STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

S.F. Homeless Project Served Only the Status Quo



"*Faux Street Revisited*." The viewpoint of a homeless woman on a San Francisco street, as people hurry past and an entire city ignores her plight. Painting by Christine Hanlon

by Carol Denney

Review of S.F. Homeless Project

The *San Francisco Chronicle* spearheaded a blizzard of media coverage on homelessness from late June to July 3, 2016. Calling it "S. F. Homeless Project," the homeless coverage included 70 news outlets, by the *Chronicle's* own count.

After a week of homeless-focused stories, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran an editorial on its front page headlined, "A Civic Disgrace," and essentially endorsed the status quo: more money for "services," of course — *and good luck with that*.

But the rest sounded pretty familiar: stricter tracking systems for the use of services, more enforcement of anti-homeless laws and police sweeps of tent cities to "ensure that the people who are offered this array of assistance are no longer afforded the option to flout the law with impunity."

Flout the law with impunity. It sounds like a cool dance step you pick up in a hip hop class. But it's the smear out of almost every Bay Area news outlet and the snarl on the face of almost every politician in close concert. It's the best-known song about the housing crisis, and it helps to consider that *some people benefit from homelessness*. The average rent in San Francisco is $4,500 a month, which has a lot more to do with the creation of homelessness than drug abuse, mental illness, and all of the rest of the red herrings the *Chronicle* loves to flog, combined.

There's a clear mechanism in play at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, a mechanism recognizable nationwide. *Chronicle* reporters repeatedly savage the poor on the street for being in the way, for being messy, for inevitable and natural behavior such as sleeping, sitting, defecating, etc.

Chronicle columnists continuously stoke animosity toward people on the street year round, promulgating deceptive but popular mythology, like the idea that homeless people *prefer* to live on the street.

A few reporters, Kevin Fagan and Heather Knight in particular, manage to

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Oakland's "Abatement" of Homeless People

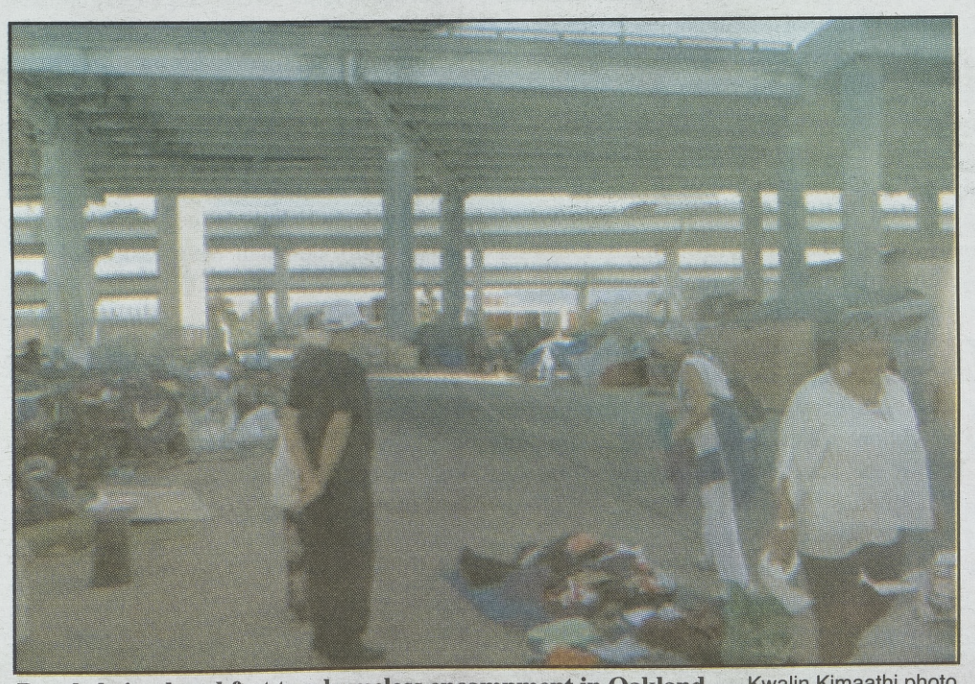
by Kheven LaGrone

People living in Oakland's homeless encampments are residents and citizens of Oakland. Even though they live in a unique situation, they have voting rights. Each person has his or her personal story. Some have jobs but can't find affordable housing. Some can't get jobs. Some need medication, have health issues, or substance control problems, and some don't. Like anyone else, people in encampments want clean and safe places to stay.

Robert is a leader in his encampment. The less attention his encampment gets, the less the surrounding neighbors will complain about their presence. He is not a criminal, but is unemployable.

Robert knows everyone in his encampment. He fears strangers bringing drugs and violence into the area, and complains about outsiders driving to the encampment and dumping trash. Not only will he and his encampment members have to live in the trash; he worries that the neighbors in surrounding homes will blame them for it.

He keeps the noise down in the encampment. Even though it is under a busy freeway overpass, he worries about



People bring breakfast to a homeless encampment in Oakland. Kwalin Kimaathi photo

City officials dehumanize people by referring to "debris abatement and homeless abatement." Abatement refers to trash or noise, not people. They are human beings, not debris, and must not be eliminated, or scrubbed away.

bringing attention to the people who have found refuge there. When members of the Auset Movement gave brooms and garbage bags to Robert and other people living in his encampment, they cleaned the area themselves.

So I became disturbed after reading more than 200 pages of City of Oakland public emails demanding the displacement of people living in homeless encampments in Oakland. The emails dehumanized homeless people, and were written as if homeless people chose to live in those encampments and had other options.

The emails suggested criminalizing and policing people in encampments for trespassing, violating curfew or blocking a sidewalk. Such writers seemed oblivious to the reality that if the homeless person had somewhere else to go, he or she would likely have already been there. The emails were with Joe DeVries, Assistant to the City Administrator, who wrote on January 21, 2016, that he "help(s) facilitate the removal of encampments."

Too bad Robert wasn't included in the email discussions. He could have reminded

See **Oakland's "Abatement"** *page 15*

Oakland Robs the Poor of Dignity and Daily Bread

The poor are paying the price of your silence. Your silence robs them of their jobs and their dignity. Your silence robs them of their health, their homes and their hopes.



Landon Goodwin, a well-loved friend and pastor of Oakland's recyclers, hauls heavy carts to Alliance. Photo: Dogtown Redemption

Destroying Alliance Recycling is not about compassion, Mayor Schaaf. It is hateful and harmful prejudice masquerading as law. By any definition, the systematic discrimination, incrimination and elimination of a vulnerable population of poor and homeless people is a form of state-sanctioned violence.

An Open Letter to Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf from Amir Soltani

Dear Mayor Schaaf,

One of the great legends of the French Revolution is the statement Jean Jacques Rousseau attributed to a "great princess," most commonly ascribed to Marie-Antoinette. Upon learning that France's peasants had no bread, she declared, *"Qu'ils mangent de la brioche."*

"Let them eat cake."

When I moved to West Oakland, I was surprised to find that the poverty is so deep in the city that there is a virtual cottage industry of poor people who survive by picking up our trash. Yours and mine.

We are not talking about one or two people. We are talking about hundreds of people. Bottles and cans are their daily bread. No cakes for them.

They gather their bottles and cans as best they can, often on foot, but also with shopping carts, bikes and even prams, and convert their daily haul into cash at Alliance Metals, a recycling center near the MacArthur Highway on Peralta Street.

I have followed their lives for over eight years during the course of filming *Dogtown Redemption*. I have witnessed the hardship, the intelligence and the resilience that goes into recycling bottles and cans. I know what recycling means and what it does for them.

For Jefferson Miles, a longtime Oakland resident, and a retired longshoreman, recycling was a daily ritual. A heart attack had left him half-paralyzed and homebound. He did not sit at home with a cane. He moved through the city with his shopping cart. Recycling broke his isolation. And it kept his heart pumping.

For Thomas Sommerville, a Vietnam veteran who lived out of his truck, recycling was an honest, Christian way to make a living. It was crime-free.

For Ros, Marvel and Heather, recycling was the ticket out of prostitution. Picking up trash all day, to them, was about reclaiming their bodies and lives. That's liberty with a very big "L."

For Miss Kay, a former drummer for the band Polkacide, recycling was a way to fight back grief and mental illness. The walking and working structured her day and steadied her mind.

For Jason Witt, a high school drop-out, recycling has been a test of his character, creativity and resourcefulness — a job that allows him to overcome injuries and illnesses most of us cannot imagine.

I wish I could pretend that you do not know the recyclers. I wish I could pretend that they are strangers to you, and to the members of the Oakland City Council.

But they are not. As a member of the City Council, Mayor Schaaf, you have repeatedly heard the recyclers' testimonies. You know what recycling at Alliance means to them. And not only to them, but to the countless faith leaders, medical and mental health professionals, homeless advocates, social entrepreneurs and business leaders who have stepped up to the plate and stood before the City Council and spoken in their defense.

I should add that over the past decades, the recyclers have had many defenders and advocates within the City, as reflected in the internal deliberations, reports and decisions by departments ranging from planning to legal.

The general consensus, for decades, has been that on balance, Alliance is a viable business, one that serves as a lifeline for Oakland's underclass. One measure of this value is that Alliance pumps up to $3 million in the pockets of its walk-in and shopping-cart clients. Another is that the business has been operating in Oakland for decades. It has grown at a time when all other forms of support for the poorest citizens have been shrinking.

Its success is not a reason to destroy it. It is a reason to recognize how desperately poor people need legitimate sources of income and support.

As a member of the Oakland City Council, you have not just heard these voices and facts. You have also voted on them. So have the other members of the City Council. Every time the question of shutting down Alliance was brought before the Council, the Council has voted to keep Alliance open.

On one such occasion, I interviewed your distinguished predecessor, Ron Dellums. He dismissed attempts to shut down Alliance by denying Oakland's residents the right to recycle trash as a "backhanded" way of "dehumanizing" the poor.

It is against this historical and political background that I find your administration's failure to address the plight of Oakland's shopping-cart recyclers a matter of grave concern.

First, until now, you have refused to disavow statements made by the Oakland City Attorney's Office. I do not believe that Oakland City Attorney Barbara Parker believes in the statements issued by her office. But she too has failed to disavow them. The statements of the neighbors are treated as if they are the letter of the law. Yet none of their charges has been presented in public, let alone ruled on by a court of law.

In letters sent to your office and that of the City Attorney, I have challenged your right to label shopping-cart recyclers, en masse, as "thieves and addicts." Such statements have no basis in fact or law. The City of Oakland should not target an entire class of people, most of whom are poor, many of whom are African-American, and some of whom are disabled, by virtue of their economic status.

As you and the City Attorney are undoubtedly aware, earlier attempts by Councilwoman Nancy Nadel to ban shopping-cart recyclers based on their mode of transportation were deemed discriminatory and illegal, a violation of state law.

As Mayor, you have taken an oath and assumed an obligation to serve and protect all of Oakland's residents, not some. Yet the entire process by which the City of Oakland has moved to shut down Alliance by labeling it as a nuisance is suspect.

After failing to shut down Alliance by banning shopping-cart recyclers, and after launching several failed sting operations with the intent to frame Alliance's owners, employees and clients as thieves, the City suddenly found a convenient legal loophole and started fining Alliance thousands of dollars on the grounds that shopping-cart recyclers block traffic.

Faced with the risks of massive fines — as well as massive emotional stress — the new owners relented. The neighbors had essentially converted the City's legal machinery into a private instrument for aborting a local business. The City Attorney acted on their behalf and reported to them. As reflected in the City Attorney's letter to the neighbors, the law and facts were distorted, and fines imposed to secure "outcomes" that the Attorney's Office believed would advance the "quality of life" of the neighbors.

No consideration was given to the impact of labeling shopping-cart recyclers as thieves and addicts. They were stripped of the dignity of their labor and robbed of their source of income without the slightest concern for the impact of such prejudices and policies on the quality of their life.

The poor were trashed. You permitted the machinery of the City to serve one and only one constituency. And you denied another constituency — an entire community of poor, largely African-American residents — the right to defend themselves. They were condemned and incriminated, a priori, as thieves and addicts. No facts. No evidence. The neighbors said so. And you believed them and acted on that belief. Or at least, permitted the City Attorney's Office and others to do so.

And what is more, since the new owners had stepped into a trap, the City was in a position to blame them for breaking the rules, violating the neighbors and betraying the recyclers. In politics as in business, fair is foul and foul is fair — anything to please the neighbors. And everything to wipe out the source of nuisance, trash and blight — the recyclers.

Mayor Schaaf, all of this has happened under your watch. It is all very sneaky. Clearly, elevating the quality of life of some Oakland residents over the economic livelihood of hundreds of others does not bother or trouble you. It is your policy to sanctify prejudice as law. And it is your policy to institutionalize inequality by focusing your energy on protecting the quality of life of the middle-class and neglecting the quality of life of the poor.

You are blind to privilege even when it manifests itself as prejudice — the degradation of shopping-cart recyclers by neighbors. You give the neighbors the loudspeaker. But when it comes to the poor, you push the mute button.

Have no illusions about the price of your silence.

Words can kill multitudes. They shape prejudices. They feed perceptions. And they form policies.

We don't need to look to Trump to understand that hateful speech leads to harmful actions.

Barbara Parker's speech — at least what has come out of her office — is enough to make Trump blush. Somehow in Oakland, the supposed bastion of liberal and progressive politics, it is okay to label the poor, en masse, as thieves and addicts, and to deny them their only source of income. And it is okay to cut hundreds of recyclers off by destroying the recycling business that serves them.

This is the logic of collective punishment. The same logic, if applied to the OPD over the recent sex scandal, would mean closing down the Oakland Police Department on the grounds that all policemen are sexual predators. You are the first to defend the policemen. You insist on granting them due process instead of firing them, en masse. The City protects its own. The police are your boys. The recyclers aren't. And so you have no qualms about shutting down the recycling center, simply based on what the neighbors say.

Let's have no illusions about the impact of Barbara Parker's words or your silence. When you incriminate an entire profession and label any group as thieves

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City of Oakland Robs the Poor

from page 2

and addicts, you are setting them up for prison. And for poverty. And in far too many cases, for the morgue.

Nobody blames you for the crisis of poverty and homelessness enveloping America, or even Oakland. It is bigger than one person. But as mayor, you set the tone. You are the leader. You define the politics and the culture. Your values inform the people. You act and speak in their name.

When you are silent before the atrocity being unleashed against the recyclers, when you are silent when they are called thieves, and silent when they are called addicts, then you are degrading their life and distorting their work by failing to recognize and defend their humanity.

And when you fail, the city fails, the people fail and America fails. Everybody else knows that they too can fail to recognize the humanity of the poor. The OPD knows it. The neighbors know it. Kids know it. Criminals know it. The poor and the homeless are easy targets. It is okay to get rid of them. After all, their presence violates the quality of our life. They are dirty. They are foul. And they are offensive. Just like trash. Let's get rid of them. And what better way to get rid of them than by destroying the recycling center where they congregate — the church of the poor.

Besides, nobody's keeping tabs on them in the morgue. The cause of their death is not our prejudice or policies. It is not your absence or silence. It is they, the poor, who have failed themselves. Not us. Not the neighbors. Not the owners of Alliance. And certainly not you.

Of course, no one can know your constraints, your true intentions and motivations. Or for that matter, the content of your character or conscience. But one can judge you based on your conduct and your actions. And so far, I can assure you that you have failed — and failed dismally — when it comes to serving and protecting Oakland's poor.

If you truly cared about Oakland's shopping-cart recyclers, as some neighbors claim they do, then you would feel some responsibility for their fate once Alliance shuts down on August 20. You would have commissioned a study, and at least interviewed a handful of recyclers, to see if the claims about them by the City Attorney and neighbors pass muster.

Even if all the charges were true — and every recycler in Oakland was proven beyond a shadow of doubt to be a thief and an addict — you would have still searched for their humanity and dignity. You would have treated them honorably because you would act and speak in the name of all the people of Oakland, the living as well as the dead.

You would reflect what is best about Oakland by making sure that every citizen and resident, even and especially those who are lost, deserve a shot at redemption. That the thief and the addict are not just a thief and an addict, but to borrow from West Oakland's native son, Ron Dellums, 1,001 adjectives, many of them sublime.

You would have seen their resilience, their creativity, their compassion and their courage. You would not stoop down to the lowest common denominator. You would not look at them through the narrow perspective of the neighbors, but with your own eyes and through your own heart. And that of Martin Luther King and Mandela, Kennedy and Roosevelt. You would be bound by the highest principles that hold our nation together. As a matter of constitutional duty, you would be the first to disavow the twisting of the law to harm the poor. You would guard the fabric of language because every life in Oakland, including that of the homeless, the thief and the addict, would matter to you.



Chihiro Wimbush (*at left*) and Amir Soltani, co-directors of *Dogtown Redemption*.

Mayor Schaaf, your policy has sanctified prejudice as law and institutionalized inequality. Somehow in Oakland, the supposed bastion of liberal and progressive politics, it is okay to label the poor, en masse, as thieves and addicts, and to deny them their only source of income.

I have been waiting for evidence of compassion. So far, I have found none. If you cared about the shopping-cart recyclers, you would have a plan for them. Given that the City accuses Alliance's owners of short-changing the recyclers, you would have set aside at least $3-10 million annually for the next ten years — only a fraction of the $1 billion Waste Management contract — to offer an alternative to Alliance's employees and the shopping-cart recyclers. You have done nothing of the sort. The question has not been asked. And the problem has not even been recognized.

Why?

Given all the hours of consideration given to the neighbors and their quality of life, how many hours have you and your office devoted to the fate of the recyclers after August 20? Can you share one internal memo to bolster confidence that over the past year you and your assistants have been planning to present Oakland's poor with a better vision for their future? Is there, for example, a single scale or truck assigned to weigh and transport their bottles and cans to another recycling center?

Have you made any special provisions for the disabled recyclers who can barely walk to Alliance? Or are the disabled buried under the category of thieves and addicts too? What about the African-American women and girls? Councilwoman Brooks was appalled when they said that if Alliance shuts down they would "ho"? What jobs do you have in mind for them? And those with mental health issues? What will happen to them when they lose their community center, and find themselves lost in a world in which no one recognizes or greets them?

What is the plan, Mayor? Where are the poorest residents of West Oakland supposed to go in a game of Monopoly in which no one can afford the price of labor, land, space or time? And if there is none, what does that say about your vision for our City and people's future? It is one in which the poor have not only *ceased to count — they must cease to* exist. Their very presence is offensive. All they can be and all they can expect from your administration is to be labeled as thieves and addicts. Why? Because the neighbors say so.

Do you know Moses, a homeless recycler featured on Fox's local channel? He sells *Street Spirit* — the homeless newspaper — and he recycles at Alliance. He's the guy with the "Homeless Lives Matter" sign. Pray tell, when Alliance is shut down, will you invite him to stay at your house? Will the neighbors? Of 200 members of his family, only 10 remain in Oakland. Do you wonder what happened to his clan? Were they all labeled as thieves and addicts? Or perhaps blight? How were they wiped out? How were they defamed and dislocated? How much silence did that take on the part of public officials?

Mayor Schaaf, on August 20, the City of Oakland's guillotine will come down on their heads, hearts and homes.

It is happening on your watch, so you should be ready to take the credit for it. You and the City Attorney. Crack open the champagne. Maybe have a fundraiser. Be sure to invite the neighbors. Offer them the scalp of the owners of Alliance. And throw in a few recyclers. Perhaps you can even hang a giant sign over Alliance, and around the necks of all of Oakland's poor: Schaafted.

August 20, 2016. Mission accomplished.

The truth is that the Mission is accomplished. Oakland is already dead. If there were life in it, if there were love in it, we would never label our poor as thieves and addicts. That's not a measure of their poverty. It is a measure of our poverty. It is a measure of your poverty.

Poverty, as Landon Goodwin, one of our recyclers, now a pastor, reminded Lynette McElhaney at our West Oakland film screening, is a state of mind. So is prejudice. And privilege. They feed off each other.

Destroying Alliance on August 20 — the chop — is not about compassion, Madame Mayor. It is hateful and harmful prejudice masquerading as law. By virtually any definition, the systematic discrimination, incrimination and elimination of a vulnerable population is a form of state-sanctioned violence.

Sure it is happening on a small scale. What is the death of one recycling center or even one recycler in the grand scheme of things? The truth is that it is everything. It is our little corner of America. If you ask me, every square inch matters. Every life matters. Just as every death matters. And the test of a civilization is what we do at these inflection points.

August 18 is the anniversary of the death of Miss Kay. That is two days before your guillotine comes down on Alliance. I think a lot about why Miss Kay died on the streets. Why was she *assaulted? Why are so many homeless* people assaulted? Why do we fear, hate and hurt them? Why do we label them as thieves and addicts? How much pain and punishment get attached to these labels?

What happens when the City Attorney and the Mayor of Oakland lend the stamp and seal of their office to these charges? What does this language do to the most vulnerable, and often the most sensitive people in our midst? What does it do to the youngest and most impressionable?

While a few neighbors may consider the destruction of an American business and the elimination of jobs and the incrimination of the poor a victory, your job is not to reflect ignorance and cruelty, almost verbatim. It is to weigh and measure every word. It is to consider the consequences for Oakland. It is too late to commission a study. But one thing is guaranteed. There will be more homelessness and poverty in Oakland, not less. There will be more pain and more drugs, not less. And there will be more despair and more deaths, not less.

Madame Mayor: Have no illusions. The poor are paying the price of your silence.

Your silence robs them of their jobs. Your silence robs them of their dignity. Your silence robs them of their health. Your silence robs them of their homes. Your silence robs them of their hopes.

Oakland's $1 billion garbage contract has already gone to Waste Management. Nobody is asking you for a share of the Waste Management cake. But please, for Oakland's sake — if not God's sake — break your silence. Do not deny the poor their dignity. Or their daily bread. Offer them opportunities and alternatives.

Amir Soltani is the co-director with Chihiro Wimbush of *Dogtown Redemption*, televised nationally on PBS. He spent eight years filming the lives of poor and homeless shopping-cart recyclers in West Oakland.

Protect Oakland's Recyclers

Petition on MoveOn.org
To be delivered to Libby Schaaf, Mayor, City of Oakland

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by the City of Oakland's decision to shut down Alliance Recycling on August 20 without offering hundreds of poor recyclers, many of whom are African-American, an alternative source of income.

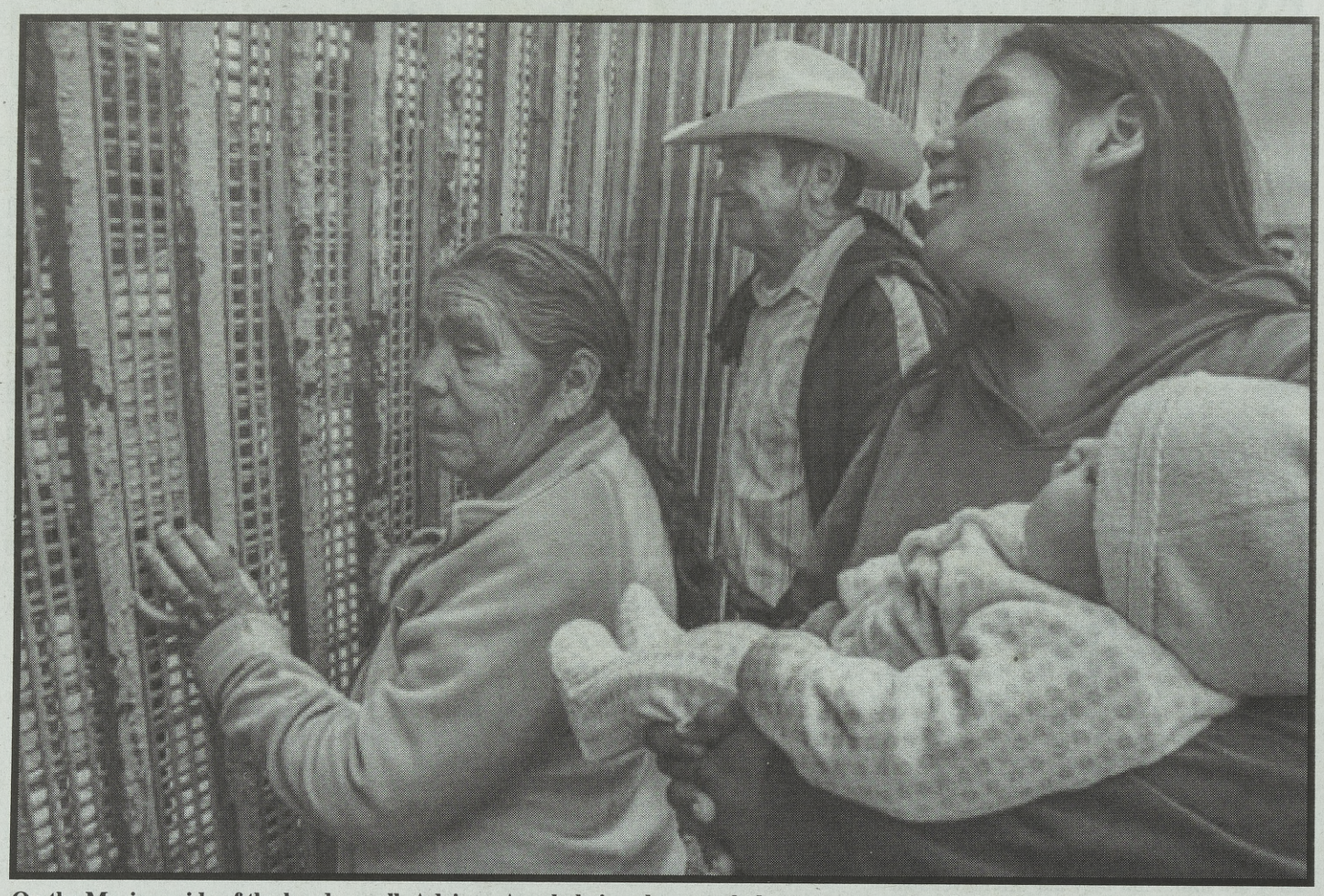
We are gravely concerned by the Oakland City Attorney's Office characterizing Alliance as a 'nuisance' and incriminating shopping cart recyclers, en masse, as 'thieves' and 'addicts.' Such language strips recyclers of the dignity of their labor.

We urge you to take note of the ACLU's letter urging the City of Oakland to find a compassionate solution to this unfolding economic and humanitarian crisis, one that balances the City's concern for the quality of life of some neighbors with the need to protect the economic livelihood of the clients, employees and owners of Alliance Recycling.

At a time when homelessness and poverty threaten the lives of millions of Americans, we trust that, in consultation with the City Council, you will provide the necessary leadership, imagination and compassion to serve and protect the interests of all of Oakland's residents, particularly the most vulnerable.

"No Touching" Through the Border's Iron Bars

by David Bacon



On the Mexican side of the border wall, Adriana Arzola brings her new baby to meet her family living in the U.S. for the first time. Families meet through the wall every Sunday at the Friendship Park, in Playas de Tijuana. David Bacon photo



In Playas de Tijuana, on the Mexican side of the border wall between Mexico and the United States, Catelina Cespedes and Carlos Alcaide greet Florita Galvez, who is on the U.S. side. David Bacon photo

It took two days on the bus for Catalina Cespedes and her husband Teodolo Torres to get from their hometown in Puebla to Tijuana. On a bright Sunday in May they went to the beach at Playas de Tijuana. There the wall separating Mexico from the U.S. plunges down a steep hillside and levels off at the Parque de Amistad, or Friendship Park, before crossing the sand and heading out into the Pacific surf.

Sunday is the day for families to meet through the border wall. The couple had come to see their daughter, Florita Galvez.

Florita had arrived that day in San Ysidro, the border town south of San Diego. Then she went out to the Border Field State Park, by the ocean, two miles west of town. From the park entrance it was a 20-minute walk to the section of the wall next to the Parque de Amistad.

At 11 that morning, Catalina and Florita finally met, separated by the metal border. They looked at each other through the metal screen that covers the wall's bars, in the small area where people on the U.S. side can actually get next to it.

And they touched. Catalina pushed a finger through one of the screen's half-inch square holes. On the other side, Florita touched it with her own finger.

Another family shared the space with Catalina and Teodolo. Adriana Arzola had brought her baby Nazeli Santana, now several months old, to meet her family living on the U.S. side for the first time. Adriana had family with her also — her grandmother and grandfather, two older children and a brother and sister.

It was very frustrating, though, to try to see people on the other side through the half-inch holes. So they moved along the wall to a place where the screen ended. There the vertical 18-foot iron bars of the wall — what the wall is made of in most places — are separated by spaces about four inches wide. Family members in the United States could see the baby as Adriana held her up.

But only from a distance. The rules imposed by the U.S. Border Patrol in Border Field State Park say that where there's no screen, the family members on that side have to stay several feet away from the wall. So no touching.

I could see the sweep of emotions playing across the faces of everyone, and in their body language. One minute the grandmother was laughing, and the next there were tears in her eyes. The grandfather just smiled and smiled. Adriana talked to her relatives, and tried to wake the baby up. Her brother leaned on the bars with his arms folded against his eyes, and her sister turned away, overcome by sadness. On the U.S. side, a man in a wheelchair and two women with him looked happy just to have a chance to see their family again.

Some volunteers, most from the U.S. side, called Friends of Friendship Park, have tried to make the Mexican side more pleasant and accommodating for families.

The older children with Adriana sat at concrete picnic tables. While family members talked through the wall, they used colored markers, provided by the Friends, to make faces and write messages on smooth rocks. Around them were the beginnings of a vegetable garden. Later in the afternoon, one of the volunteers harvested some greens for a salad.

Members of the Friends group include Pedro Rios from the U.S./Mexico Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee, and Jill Holslin, a photographer and border activist. On the U.S. side, another of the participating groups, Angeles de la Frontera, or Border Angels, helped the families that came to the park.

"We're here seven or eight times a month," said Enrique Morones, the group's director. "People get in touch with us because we're visible, or they know someone else we helped before." Border Angels helps set up the logistics so that families can arrive on both sides at the same time, often coming from far away.

Weekend visiting hours, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., are the only time the Border Patrol allows families to get close to the wall for reunions. Once a year, they open a doorway in the wall. Watched closely by BP agents, family members are allowed to approach the open door one by one, and then to hug a mother or father, a son or daughter, or another family member from the other side. To do that, people have to fill in a form and show the agents they have legal status in the U.S. During the rest of the year, the Border Patrol doesn't ask about legal status, although they could at any moment. For that reason, Border Angels tells families not to go on their own.

Such carefully controlled and brief encounters are the ultimate conclusion of a process that, at its beginning, had no controls at all. Before 1848, there was no border here whatsoever. That year, at the conclusion of what the U.S. calls "the Mexican War," the two countries signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Mexico was forced to give up 529,000 square miles of its territory. The U.S. paid, in theory, $15,000,000 for the land, but then simply deducted it from the debt it claimed Mexico owed it. U.S. troops occupied Mexico City to force the government there to sign the treaty.

The so-called "Mexican Cession" accounts for 14.9 percent of the total land area of the United States, including the entire states of California, Nevada and Utah, almost all of Arizona, half of New Mexico, a quarter of Colorado and a piece of Wyoming. Some Congress members even called for annexing all of Mexico.

At the time, the city of San Diego was a tiny, unincorporated settlement of a few hundred people. It was considered a suburb of Los Angeles, then still a small town. San Ysidro didn't exist, nor did Tijuana. To mark the new border, in 1849 a U.S./Mexico boundary commission put a marble monument in the shape of a skinny pyramid where they thought the line should go. A replica of that original pyramid today sits next to the wall in the Parque de Amistad. On the U.S. side, the road leading from San Ysidro to Boundary Field State Park is named Monument Road, and the area is called Monument Mesa.

Early tourists chipped so many pieces from the marble pyramid that it had to be replaced in 1894. The first fence was erected, not along the borderline, but around the new monument to keep people from defacing it. The line itself was still unmarked, 50 years after it had been created.

The Border Patrol was organized in 1924. Before that, there was no conception that passage back and forth between Mexico and the United States on

See **No Touching** *page 5*

Another Brick in the Wall

Ask the candidates where they expect people on the streets to go. If they start tossing around the usual platitudes, interrupt, and say, "I'm sorry, what I meant was, where do you expect people on the streets to go right now, *today*."

by Carol Denney

Take a local tour of Trump policy in action in the East Bay where building a wall isn't just a laughable Republican pipe dream. If you live close to Berkeley or Albany, it's something you can see in all its comic finery mid-construction without the inconvenience of any election, without any public hearing or vote, without any community involvement whatsoever.

Start with the Gilman Street underpass next time you're on your way to the Berkeley Kite Festival or picking up greens at Whole Foods. Little by little, the underpass is being fenced off so that no one can take shelter underneath it.

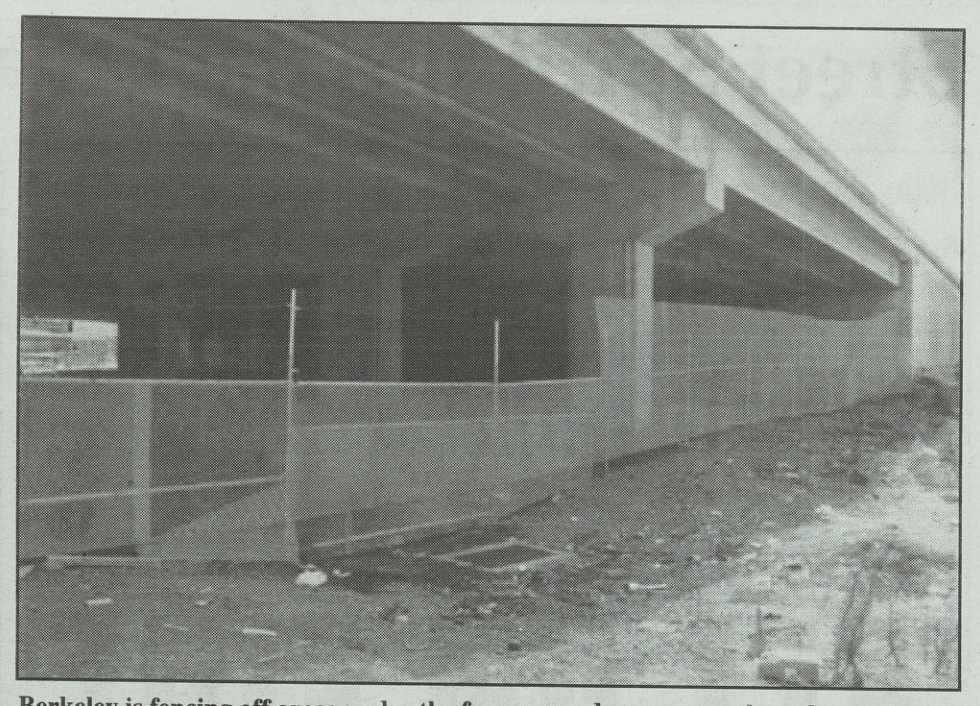
The bare square footage best sheltered from the wind and rain is now fenced off as securely as the Chancellor's mansion on the University of California's Berkeley campus, at a similar cost to the public purse.

You may have noticed the same phenomenon at the Berkeley Main Post Office on Allston. A fierce, black fence surrounds ... *nothing at all*, unless you count some creative sidewalk chalk. It would seem to be a reaction to the "First They Came for the Homeless" protest, as well as a pre-emptive strike against potential violations of 647(e), which states:

"Except as provided in subdivision (l), every person who commits any of the following acts is guilty of disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor: (e) Who lodges in any building, structure, vehicle, or place, whether public or private, without the permission of the owner or person entitled to the possession or in control of it..."

You'll find the same pre-emptive architectural phenomenon on old City Hall's lawn, which now sports "protective" green, plastic fencing just about anywhere one could conceivably place one's pillow. The constitutionality of a law such as 647(e) in a world without adequate low-cost housing or shelter continues to lumber through various courts, of course, but your public servants are content to assume, given convention and tradition, that by the time the horror of this cruel policy is fully exposed, they will be long gone.

Were members of the public asked to weigh in on such absurd and inhuman expenditures? Not at all. If you're a member of the public sympathetic to those who have suffered the effects of skyrocketing evictions and plummeting wages, or even a member of the public watching this happen to your neighbors, family, or friends, your public servants are nonetheless busy fencing off public space whether you find it ridiculous or not.



Berkeley is fencing off areas under the freeway underpass so no homeless person can take shelter from the rain anymore. That's cruelty disguised as policy.

Should they be getting the public's permission? Of course. But as long as the public is relatively silent, they enjoy an uneasy protection if they stand next to the towering mountain of anti-homeless and anti-vagrant laws, both old and new, which take acres of time and money to battle.

The constitutional challenge to such laws generally requires so much organized time and money to fight that entire eras of public policy will elapse unscathed by constraint: moral, legal, or otherwise.

If you're offered an opportunity to ask the candidates for local political office whether or not they approve of not only the fences and walls, but of the processes, if in fact there are processes, which allow the public to be completely circumvented in their creation, by all means do so.

Whether they style themselves as from the right or the left, ask them where they expect people on the streets to go. And if they start tossing the usual platitudes around in the air, lean in, interrupt, and say, "I'm sorry, what I meant was, where do you expect people on the streets to go right now, *today*."

Otherwise our silence becomes not only complicity. It also becomes just another very real brick in the wall.

No Touching Through the Border's Iron Bars

from page 4

Monument Mesa had to be restricted. The federal government only assumed control over immigration in 1890, when construction began on the first immigration station at Ellis Island in New York harbor.

Racial exclusions existed in U.S. law from the late 1800s, but the requirement that people have a visa to cross the border was only established by the Immigration Act of 1924. The law also established a racist national quota system for handing visas out.

In the 1930s, the Border Patrol terrorized barrios across the United States, putting thousands of Mexicans into railroad cars and dumping them across the border. Even U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, or people who just looked Mexican, were swept up and deported. Trains carried deportees to the border stations in San Ysidro and Calexico, but on Monument Mesa there was still no formal line to keep people from returning.

That changed for the first time after World War II, when barbed wire was stretched from San Ysidro to the ocean. Mexicans called it the "alambre," or the wire. Those who crossed it became "alambristas." Yet enforcement was still not very strict. During the 1950s and early 1960s, thousands of Mexican workers were imported to the U.S. as braceros, while many migrants also came without papers. In the Imperial Valley, on weekends during the harvest, those workers would walk into Mexicali, on the Mexican side, to hear a hot band or go dancing, and then hitch a ride back to sleep in their labor camps in Brawley or Holtville.

In 1971, Pat Nixon, wife of Republican President Richard Nixon, inaugurated Border Field State Park. The day she visited, she asked the Border Patrol to cut the barbed wire so she could greet the Mexicans who'd come to see her. She told them, "I hope there won't be a fence here too much longer."

Instead, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986. Although many people remember the law for its amnesty for undocumented immigrants, IRCA also began the process of dumping huge resources into border enforcement. A real fence was built in the early 1990s, made of metal sheets taken from decommissioned aircraft carrier landing platforms. The sheets had holes, so someone could peek through. But for the first time, people coming from each side could no longer physically mix together or hug each other.

That old wall still exists on the Mexican side in Tijuana and elsewhere on the border. But Operation Gatekeeper, the Clinton administration border enforcement program, sought to push border crossers out of urban areas like San Ysidro, into remote desert regions where crossing was much more difficult and dangerous. To do that, the government had contractors build a series of walls that were harder to cross. On Monument Mesa, the aircraft landing strips were replaced in 2007 by the 18-foot wall of vertical metal columns. Two years later, a second wall was built on the U.S. side behind the first. The area between them became a security zone where the Border Patrol restricts access to the wall itself to just four hours on Saturday and Sunday. The metal columns were extended into the Pacific surf.

In Playas, though, the wall is just a sight to see for the hundreds of people who come out to the beach on the weekend. The seafood restaurants are jammed, and sunbathers set up their umbrellas on the sand. Occasionally, a curious visitor will walk up and look through the bars into the United States, or have a boyfriend or girlfriend take a picture next to the wall, uploading it to Facebook or Instagram for their friends.

The wall itself at the Parque de Amistad has become a changing artwork. As the bars rust, they've been painted with graffiti that protests the brutal division.

One section has the names of U.S. military veterans who've been deported to Mexico, with the dates of their service and death. A deported veterans group comes down on occasional Sundays, with some in uniform. In angry voices, they ask why fighting the United States' wars didn't keep them from being pushed onto the Mexican side of the wall.

What is Urban Shield?

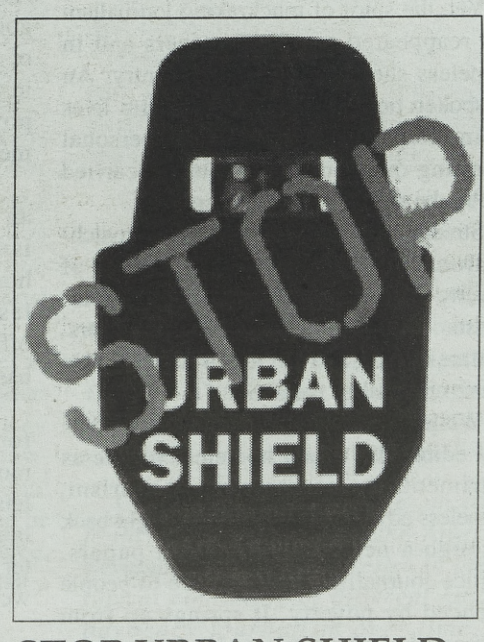
Urban Shield is a national war games, SWAT training and weapons expo, held each year in Alameda County, with exercises all over the Bay Area, and attended by hundreds of local, federal and international agencies.

Its goal is to collaborate on, expand and profit from new forms of surveillance, state repression, and state violence and is hosted with support from a grant from the Department of Homeland Security's Urban Area's Security Initiative.

It brings together police departments and SWAT teams, fire departments, emergency medical services and weapons manufacturers for training exercises and thus consolidates notions of public safety and security under the discursive logics of and material structures and systems of increased militarization.

Organizations from across the state will be mobilizing to come to Pleasanton, the site of this year's Urban Shield weapons expo. Join the Stop Urban Shield Coalition in shutting down the expo and say no to militarization in our communities.

Friday, Sept. 9, 2016, 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.
Alameda County Fairgrounds
4501 Pleasanton Ave, Pleasanton, CA



STOP URBAN SHIELD

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **J.C. Orton.**

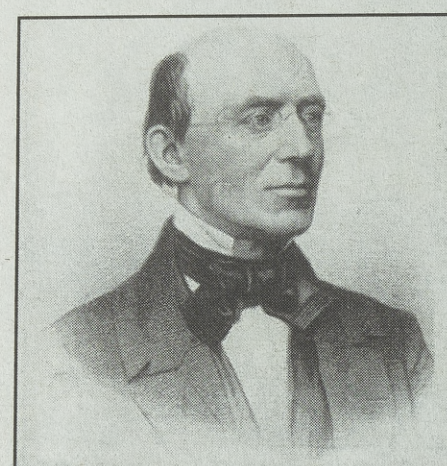
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Street Spirit and the Legacy of Justice Journalism



WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON and the ABOLITION of SLAVERY

ALL ON FIRE



If You Want Peace, Work For Justice

William Lloyd Garrison was a greatly inspiring role model for all journalists dedicated to social justice. *All on Fire* is a biography of the abolitionist journalist.

by Terry Messman

Many forms of advocacy journalism have arisen to fight social injustice in the United States, beginning in the very first stages of American history with the radical pamphlets by Thomas Paine that helped incite a revolution against British rule.

Radically outspoken and dissenting journalists were an indispensable part of nearly every important reform movement and populist rebellion in U.S. history.

Hated by the powers that be in their time, and condemned as muckrakers, agitators and disturbers of the peace, many are now legendary figures, remembered and honored as exemplary models of journalism with a social conscience.

In varying ways, these writers practiced what I call "Justice Journalism."

These iconic journalists include the courageous reporting of William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass in the abolitionist press; the investigative writing of Ida B. Wells in uncovering the massive extent of lynching; the muckraking reporting of Upton Sinclair that exposed the horrific conditions in Chicago stockyards; Dorothy Day's prophetic articles on the injustice of poverty in her *Catholic Worker* newspaper; the attacks on municipal corruption by Lincoln Steffens; the exposé of the profiteering funeral industry by Jessica Mitford; and the uncompromising struggle against the war machine waged by the underground press of the 1960s.

Refusing to accept the established order's insistence on objectivity and neutrality, they spoke out fearlessly for social justice. Their principled reporting should serve as a reminder of the truth-telling role of journalism, but this kind of passionately engaged reporting is forbidden in today's corporate newsrooms.

William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator* from 1831 to 1865, was one of the most inspiring figures in the history of journalism. But today, this celebrated writer would be considered beyond the pale for his many violations of the ethos of so-called objective reporting, which declares that participatory journalism and activism are off limits to journalists.

Garrison was a fiery writer and editor, but more than that, he was a rebel, an agitator, an enemy of the powers that be, and a jailed radical. He declared uncompromising war on the American system of slavery decades earlier than his contemporaries; for his foresight, he was condemned as seditious by government officials, locked up in jail, sued by slave shipowners, targeted by assassination threats, and assaulted by lynch mobs enraged at his uncompromising demands for immediate freedom for all those enslaved in a supposedly free land.

After Frederick Douglass escaped slavery, he became a national leader of the abolitionist movement. Douglass also became one of the most inspiring figures in the history of U.S. journalism and began publishing his abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star,* from the basement of his church in Rochester, NY.

A renowned activist and speaker, his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,* was highly influential in promoting the abolitionist movement. Along with his outspoken opposition to slavery, Douglass championed women's rights and their right to vote, and many other progressive causes, including peace, the abolition of the death penalty and free public education.

Showing the crucial ways that advocacy journalists have inspired one another in opposing injustice, Douglass wrote in his last biography that Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator,* "took a place in my heart second only to the Bible." Douglass, in turn, has inspired countless others to stand up and oppose social injustice.

In contrast to this vision of the journalist as the agent of social change, today's corporate publishers have imposed a narrow code of conformity and neutrality that has stilled the social consciences of many journalists. It is the sleep of conscience.

The voices of dissent have been silenced in favor of so-called objective reporting that, for all its avowed neutrality, seems always to uphold the established order. Journalism schools, by and large, are in lockstep with the corporate vision of sanitized, sideline-sitting reporting and rarely teach the justice journalism of the past with an eye towards inspiring students.

Yet, the spirit of muckraking journalism has reappeared on street corners and in homeless shelters across the country. An outspoken brand of justice journalism lives on in the passionate and highly personal reporting on economic inequality carried out by the nation's street newspapers.

Street papers publish front-line dispatches from the little-known waystations of poverty seldom visited by mainstream journalists — slum hotels, homeless shelters, welfare offices, and the rough streets where police criminalize the poor.

While the mainstream media stereotype and editorially attack homeless people as detrimental to commerce and tourism, homeless advocates speak up and fight back through a network of populist papers. Justice Journalism gives a voice to people silenced by poverty. It springs up from oppressed communities and voiceless people, where it has always had a home.

Advocacy Journalism and the Movement for Human Rights

An Interview with Terry Messman

"Human rights violations that would not be tolerated for any other minority are unleashed on homeless people and the mainstream media just doesn't get it. Even worse, some of the media *supports* these human rights abuses."

Interview by Jess Clarke

Street Spirit is one of the longest-lived publications on poverty, homelessness and human rights in the United States. Terry Messman produced the first issue in March 1995, and has edited and designed every issue of the newspaper for nearly 22 years.

Messman has been organizing for peace and justice since the 1970s when he was arrested several times for committing civil disobedience at nuclear weapons bases at Rocky Flats in Colorado, the Trident naval base in Washington, and Malmstrom AFB in Montana. After graduating with a degree in journalism, he spent six months in federal prison for repeated acts of civil disobedience. After prison, he attended seminary at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, graduating with an M. Div. degree. Last year, he was named a Distinguished Alumnus of the Pacific School of Religion.

In 1986, Messman became the director of the Homeless Organizing Project for American Friends Service Committee. As co-founder of the Oakland Union of the Homeless, he was arrested in many takeovers of abandoned housing, and in welfare rights protests, sleep-outs, occupations of HUD homes and the vacant federal building.

He worked with Religious Witness with Homeless People to protest the criminalization of homelessness in San Francisco, organizing many acts of civil disobedience at S.F. City Hall and occupations of vacant federally owned housing in the Presidio.

In 1995, Messman and homeless advocate Sally Hindman founded *Street Spirit*, sold by homeless vendors in Oakland and Berkeley. Subtitled "Justice News and Homeless Blues," *Street Spirit* has tirelessly defended the human rights of homeless people.

Jess Clarke: *As the founder of Street Spirit, you've seen some of the important political trends in homeless organizing and human rights advocacy in the Bay Area. Looking at the big picture, when and why did you first found Street Spirit?*

Terry Messman: We put out the first issue in March of 1995, so we've been going steadily for nearly 22 years. It's one of the most long-lived media of any kind in the nation to document the history of poverty, homelessness, and the movements to overcome economic injustice.

We founded *Street Spirit* after I'd been an activist for many years on homeless issues in Oakland and Berkeley, doing housing takeovers, and mobilizing homeless people to demonstrate at welfare offices and in many other struggles for their basic human rights.

We got a lot of positive media attention for those actions, but I grew more and more concerned that corporate media outlets were completely denigrating poor and homeless people. It was a form of character assassination in the news columns, and we got really fed up with that.

Then, in 1995, a friend of mine, Sally Hindman, who I'd known at seminary in Berkeley and who was also working on homeless issues in Oakland, advocated that I begin *Street Spirit* because she knew of my background in journalism. So we put out the first issue. I was the editor and Sally Hindman organized the first team of homeless vendors that sold the newspaper on the streets of Berkeley and Oakland.

Clarke: *Prior to that you'd been organizing direct actions as director of the Homeless Organizing Project for the AFSC. What was the reason behind switching from organizing with homeless people — where you were organizing for policy change, building housing, and doing civil disobedience — in order to create this form of media?*

Messman: We really didn't switch away from community organizing, not at that point. We continued organizing protests and civil disobedience for many years after we launched *Street Spirit*. I had been doing housing takeovers and other forms of civil disobedience in Oakland and Berkeley. Then I moved across the Bay to work with Sister Bernie Galvin in San Francisco, organizing protests against the criminalization of homeless people, as part of Religious Witness with Homeless

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People. I wrote the mission statement for Religious Witness and was instrumental in working with Sister Bernie to organize all the protests in the first few years.

Bernie Galvin was a great organizer, and we worked closely in partnership to protest the Matrix program initiated by Mayor Frank Jordan, the former police chief in San Francisco. Jordan unleashed the police in full fury against homeless people, issuing thousands of citations, fines and arrests that criminalized virtually every aspect of their existence.

Clarke: *Religious Witness with Homeless People organized very large, visible demonstrations of religious leaders for many years in San Francisco.*

Messman: Sister Bernie was a highly successful organizer in mobilizing many of the Bay Area's priests, ministers, bishops and clergy to do acts of civil disobedience in solidarity with homeless people. She mobilized hundreds of religious leaders and members of congregations to demonstrate for their rights, and I worked closely with her to design our campaigns and plan our acts of civil disobedience.

In the middle of that multi-year campaign to defend the human rights of homeless people, we realized how crucial the media was in this struggle, because the main newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, had an incredibly reactionary position on homeless issues.

It was just amazing to me to see how unfairly they covered this issue, how they just ignored massive, newsworthy protests, and how they berated and beat up on homeless people in their editorial columns, and constantly campaigned for the criminalization of homelessness.

So we realized that forming our own media could help break the bias of the corporate media, and enhance the strength of homeless organizing by making our protests more visible to the public. When I began *Street Spirit,* I was still working constantly with Religious Witness. As the years went by, though, I found that *Street Spirit* took over my entire life and consumed all my program work at the AFSC.

Clarke: *So it was an evolutionary process? Through the 1990s, it was a hybrid project?*

Messman: Yeah, I had a twofold emphasis in the 1990s on *Street Spirit* and also on the community organizing, takeovers of vacant housing, and the civil disobedience I had always done. I was juggling those dual commitments, but it was becoming more difficult to do everything.

Actually, Paul Boden of the Coalition of Homelessness was crucial in my discernment here. When I consulted with Paul in 1995 about whether we should launch *Street Spirit* — because I knew it would take a lot of time and energy — he told me then that their *Street Sheet* newspaper was the single most important tool in their arsenal, the single most powerful. He said, "You're not going to be sorry," and he was right. I really liked the work of the Coalition on Homelessness and their *Street Sheet* paper was one of the first street newspapers in the country. And so I trusted Paul Boden's guidance.

So as *Street Spirit* began gradually taking over my life, I wasn't sorry because I saw the great power it had and the meaning it held out for many people.

Clarke: *At the time, I know Street Sheet was being sold in San Francisco's North of Market and Tenderloin areas. Why did you think another street paper was necessary for the East Bay?*



Religious Witness with Homeless People gathers at San Francisco City Hall to protest the criminalization of homeless people.

What matters in the long run is staying true to the cause of justice. In the end, that is the very meaning of our lives — whether we keep going, and keep working for peace and justice, or give up in despair. It's the question at the very heart of it all.

Messman: Because the *Street Sheet* was focused in San Francisco, and we wanted *Street Spirit* to cover issues in Oakland, Berkeley, and further inland in Contra Costa County, Concord and Richmond. We felt the issues in those areas were vital. Those were the issues and the cities I knew the most. I'd always been based in the East Bay, not in San Francisco. So *Street Spirit* was formed to cover those issues in the East Bay.

The Coalition on Homelessness told us they were glad we were doing that because there hadn't been a paper there in the East Bay. Even though *Street Spirit* became a very different newspaper, we very much followed the model of the Coalition on Homelessness. I still think it's the best model in the country, because it carries out hard-hitting advocacy journalism that never apologies for being on the side of homeless and poor people.

It accepts no advertising because advertising can really distort editorial freedom and independence. And we gave it for free to homeless vendors, unlike virtually all of the homeless newspapers in this country and in Europe, who all charge their vendors. So when people buy it, they know the homeless person is getting all of the money. It's economic redistribution from the middle-class commuter to the homeless people and no nonprofit gets a cent from it.

Clarke: *I think that many people haven't really recognized the amount of media that's getting distributed on the street. Even though people see the vendors, they don't see it as a news channel. They don't realize 20,000 copies of Street Spirit are being distributed every month in the East Bay, and another 30,000 copies of Street Sheet in San Francisco. Can you talk a little more about the vendors and what the impact is on the reading audience when they're buying a paper from a homeless person on the street?*

Messman: It has always been extremely important to us that homeless vendors sell it directly to the public. Really, we should distribute *Street Spirit* at newsstands and in libraries because it would get the word out to the public more and be seen more as a "legitimate" news source, but we have felt from the beginning that a very different model was important.

The vendors sell it because we want everyone who buys it to have a one-on-one encounter with a homeless person, hoping it'll begin to erode this terrible division in American society between homeless people and the general public. That's why everyone has to buy it from a homeless vendor.

It's also modeled on the early days when a revolution was brewing in the American colonies in the 1770s. That's very much always been my model. Thomas Paine distributed revolutionary pamphlets through street vendors on the street corners to get the word out that we needed a revolution to break away from England. "Common Sense" and all of these other great writings of Thomas Paine were distributed that way.

We feel that approach is very important for us because we want to break free from the corporate chokehold on publishing. If you publish a normal magazine or newspaper, you're dealing with corporate advertisers, giant media corporations, and corporate stores that sell these things. And we just want nothing to do with any of that.

So that's always been our vision. Now, *Street Spirit* is just as well edited, well written, and as well designed as any newspaper out there. But the problem is that even though we do excellent reporting, the general public may not respect it as much as another publication simply because if a newspaper is sold by homeless people, then all their bias against homeless people carries over to the newspaper and they look at it as a poverty publication, and not a real publication.

And that's their loss. It's just a blindness that afflicts American society in general about homeless people. It's passed onto us, as the homeless newspaper of record. Nobody in the middle class thinks homeless people are worthwhile.

Clarke: *"Nobody" might be a little strong.*

Messman: Well, almost nobody. Believe me, I've been out there and there aren't many. Too many people think that homeless people are a public blight or an eyesore. That's why cities criminalize them and that's why cities attempt to banish homeless newspaper vendors.

Clarke: *Let me back up to an earlier point. You talked about the American Revolution. I'm also interested in the historical continuity of different kinds of advocacy journalism over time. The Abolitionist papers were also probably not welcomed by a lot of the community. Maybe you could talk about some of the other historical antecedents.*

I think one of the things people can come to appreciate is that this is a subversive form of journalism that actually has a real deep political intent. And it has fused the process of its sale, the content, its attempt to break away from restrictions on it being supported by advertisers and corporate controllers of speech. Can you talk a little bit about the civil rights struggles of the 19th century, anti-slavery struggles. How do you see this effort fitting into the history of the left press, the alternative press, and the resistance press now in the 21st century?

Messman: There is a long and really beautiful history of advocacy journalism and radical social justice journalism in this country. I call the work that *Street Spirit* does "Justice Journalism." This kind of conscientious and principled journalism has long historic roots in America. But even though it is an honored part of our nation's history, this kind of politically engaged journalism has been rejected and suppressed by the corporations in control of the nation's major media outlets.

I went to a very good journalism school for four years and we never heard about it in our journalism classes. Today, the only form of journalism permitted is so-called objective journalism where the reporter pretends to not have a conscience, and that's ridiculous.

In fact, every reporter has a point of view and a conscience, but they're not supposed to admit it. Basically, there's a corporate bias in all newspapers today. That's what their bias is. They don't attack very hard the Wall Street system and the bankers and the Pentagon and the White House. They're part of that system. That is their bias, but they don't acknowledge it.

So when you do advocacy journalism in this country, the first thing they'll say is, "That's not legitimate because you're not objective." And, no, we're not. We're on the side of poor and homeless people. We see a great injustice being done. We see unprecedented levels of human rights violations that would not be tolerated for any other minority. Shocking human rights abuses are being unleashed on homeless people and the mainstream media just doesn't get it. Even worse, some of the mainstream media *supports* these human rights abuses and champions

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laws that criminalize this minority.

So our advocacy journalism is important and, as you said, it has long historical roots. I look back at Thomas Paine and his pamphlets and "Common Sense" is a great inspiration to me personally.

An even greater inspiration for me has been William Lloyd Garrison and his fiery abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,* and the way that he attacked the system of slavery in his news columns in such a profound way that there were often riots by pro-slavery forces when he spoke in public. That's journalism to me!

The pro-slavery forces often laid siege to William Lloyd Garrison and other abolitionist reporters such as Frederick Douglass. They often attacked them physically because they saw how powerful these kinds of advocacy newspapers were.

Another great example is Ida B. Wells, a crusading African American writer and editor who published an expose of lynching in the South and went around the country denouncing the horrible crime of lynching. She was repeatedly attacked and had to find the courage to keep telling people that lynching was a more massive crime than they realized, and had to be ended. And the way to end it was to give a voice to its victims. I really take that to heart today. The way to end human rights violations against homeless people is to give a voice to its victims.

Then on to the 20th century, there are all these beautiful models of advocacy journalism in our nation. There are all these wonderful writers like Ida Tarbel who took on Standard Oil, and exposed the corruption of American big business; and Edwin Markham who investigated child labor. These reporters were called muckrakers and they exposed the criminal political machines of their time.

There are powerfully revealing passages in Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* that aroused the public and led to reforms in the meatpacking industry. In England, Charles Dickens was an advocacy journalist through his novels. He got untold reforms of child labor laws and workhouse abuses through his work, and taught his society the hellish conditions endured by the poor.

Clarke: *What about the role of advocacy journalism during the Vietnam War and anti-war movement in the 1960s?*

Messman: During the Civil Rights era, there were crusading advocacy journalists that bravely risked everything to tell the truth about the movement to overcome racism and the brutality of segregation. Then, in my generation, the anti-war movement of the 1960s built up an incredible array of underground newspapers in dozens of cities all over the country that gave a powerful voice to the counterculture and denounced the war machine of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, spoke out for civil rights, and spoke out for peace and justice and human liberation.

When the counterculture and all of those underground newspapers fell by the wayside, a really terrible thing happened. About the only legacy of the underground press were the so-called alternative weekly papers that basically were doing a lot of yuppie reporting on gourmet restaurants and books and consumer products, with a whole lot of advertising and just a little bit of political reporting. I'm not going to name their names.

Clarke: *Most of them have gone under.*

Messman: Yeah, most of them have gone under anyway. So I really see the resurgence of the homeless press as a very wonderful re-awakening of that spirit of advocacy journalism coming from the least likely place in society, the place where people have seemingly been silenced by poverty — but they have not been silenced. They're not voiceless and the homeless press is not voiceless.



Rev. Phil Lawson, the retired pastor of Easter Hill United Methodist Church, dedicated his entire life to working for justice.

In his *Street Spirit* interview, Rev. Phil Lawson explained the links between the struggle for immigrant rights and for civil rights, the struggle for gay rights and for the rights of homeless people. Rev. Lawson had slept out on the streets with us in solidarity with homeless people targeted by San Francisco police, and had been arrested in housing takeovers.

Clarke: *The human rights of homeless people have very direct connections with the civil rights era. There's a huge African American population that's homeless. With the upsurge of activism in the past several years as young African Americans and young people in general are becoming more politically conscious, they're ready to receive alternative information in new ways. What are the issues and the coverage that you're going to be bringing to this new millennial audience, to the Black Lives Matter audience, to the engaged, young, and really passionate activists who are coming of age in their teens, twenties, and thirties?*

Messman: That's been a remarkable development. And who would've predicted that? Everyone assumed that young people were apolitical and passive, and were buying into the consumer society. Instead, beginning with the Occupy movement, continuing to the Black Lives Matter movement and all the protests that have risen up against police brutality and police murders, all these things are incredibly heartening examples of the human spirit. They show us that organizing is never defeated. It never, ever will stop. As long as there are human beings there will be human rights movements. That's what I love about it.

In terms of *Street Spirit,* our job is not to be an all-purpose movement paper. Our job is to do what seemingly no one else in society wants to do, which is to continue our systematic coverage of poverty, homelessness, tenants facing eviction, the urban removal of homeless people, and disability rights issues. Even movement people generally ignore those issues.

So we would be more popular if we did more stuff on peace or environmental issues, but for the past 22 years, we've stubbornly focused our efforts on giving poor people a voice — because they get it nowhere else in our society. Yet, still, there are many connections, as you say, between Black Lives Matter, the anti-police abuse movements, the Occupy movement and the homeless movement.

Clarke: *Street Spirit gave a lot of coverage to the Occupy marches in Oakland.*

Messman: When the Occupy movement first began, *Street Spirit* did article after article and then we kept reporting on the marches and tent cities in every issue for a year or so. We went on the marches in Oakland and Berkeley and San Francisco, and interviewed people about Occupy and discussed what kinds of nonviolent strategizing might enhance its ability to affect the powers that be.

I went on many Occupy marches and was just amazed and overjoyed. Even though there wasn't a great sense of strategy, there was a vital outpouring of anti-corporate, populist kinds of organizing, with young people and older activists championing economic rights and denouncing the banks and resisting economic inequality. It was wonderful. So we gave it a lot of coverage. The same with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Street Spirit is constantly reporting on the criminalization of poverty, the way that poor people are turned into criminals, and many of the same patterns in law enforcement that turn African Americans into criminals and treat them as enemies, also are in play against poor people, with political officials ordering the police to treat them as criminals. So we speak out against that kind of police repression and political discrimination.

We've covered many demonstrations against police abuses. In a recent issue, we had a long, great article by Carol Denning, who covered the police review commission hearings in Berkeley that looked at why the police erupted in fury against the Black Lives Matter demonstration in Berkeley in December of 2014. We've covered that over and over.

In the past several issues, we've also focused on the attacks on poor and homeless recyclers by the Oakland City Council and police. Even when poor people work so incredibly hard to make a living, and do the kinds of tough work most people don't want to touch, they're still condemned by the powers that be. The hatred and loathing of the public gets translated into anti-homeless laws that, in this case, are forcing the closure of an Oakland recycling center that gives a solid income to hundreds of poor people. It's a stunning case of bigotry against mostly African-American recyclers.

So in those areas where the criminalization of poverty meets the criminalization of other minorities in society, *Street Spirit* covers those issues. The other thing that we've done that I think is most important is we have tried to resurrect the incredible wisdom and courage and visionary brilliance of the Civil Rights movement and remind this new generation just how great that organizing was and how much it can teach us today. We've done that through a series of interviews and articles about the Freedom Movement.

Clarke: *Yeah, maybe you can talk a little about the great practitioners you've interviewed. What's the experience like being in the room with these people and how do you distill hours of conversation with somebody like Phil Lawson or these people that have been engaged in political actions for decades, almost a half century in some cases? Describe who you've been talking to, and what's the process like in terms of getting inside the head of somebody that's been living out these issues? And why did you begin doing these interviews in the first place?*

Messman: Well, remember, the key part of *Street Spirit* is giving a voice to the voiceless. During a trip to Alabama and Mississippi in 2012, I walked into a civil rights museum in Alabama and experienced the tragic dimension of voicelessness in American history. It was stunning and led to my series of interviews with nonviolent activists and veterans of the civil rights era.

My wife Ellen Danchik and I had attended a retreat on Gandhian nonviolence given by Narayan Desai, organized by Jim and Shelley Douglass in Birmingham, Alabama. After the retreat, we visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, an incredibly significant museum that honors the Freedom Movement, located in one of the most significant cities of the civil rights era. Once inside its doors we entered the living history of the movement. It was an amazing experience and one that I've never been able to forget — one of the most powerful experiences of my life.

Clarke: *Why did it affect you so powerfully?*

Messman: The Civil Rights Institute is right across the street from the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham where Martin Luther King and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth led the children to march on the city of Birmingham, demanding justice and an end to racial discrimination.

The museum is also right across the street from Kelly Ingram Park where Sheriff Bull Connor unleashed police dogs and water cannons and brutal police who clubbed the children and the clergy and everyone else who stood up for justice.

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When you tour that museum, it breaks your heart because the 16th Street Baptist Church — right across the street — is the church where the Ku Klux Klan blew up four young Sunday School students and injured many more. Those senseless murders galvanized the movement and shocked the nation. Martin Luther King led the memorial service for the four girls killed by the Ku Klux Klan, and then went on to organize against the naked face of brutality that Bull Conner carried out in those terribly repressive days.

You feel that history all around you so deeply that it's inescapable. It's shocking to the conscience. While I was going through the museum, I saw the courageous role that Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth played in the civil rights struggle in Birmingham. He and his family were threatened. He was beaten. They were threatened with bombing. They eventually had to leave the city, and he's a hero in that city.

So it was all the more moving that when we walked out of the museum, we saw the statue of Rev. Shuttlesworth right outside. I had just been talking to people inside the museum who had known Fred Shuttlesworth and I suddenly had this terrible sadness that he was not alive. He had just died the year before we visited and I could never interview him.

When we left Birmingham, we flew out of the Fred Shuttlesworth Airport! The Civil Rights movement has taken over the very identity of Birmingham, one of the most racist cities in the South, the city that was known as "Bombingham" because there were so many bombs. Now the city is home to the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum, the Fred Shuttlesworth Airport, and all the statues of civil rights protests at Kelly Ingram Park. I was really heartened by that. And I realized I needed to interview some of these people before it was too late and they became voiceless on the historic stage.



This sculpture depicts the brutal police attacks on young civil rights marchers in Birmingham, Alabama. Several sculptures by James Drake are located in Kelly Ingram Park, a key staging area for the civil rights movement. Terry Messman photo

Clarke: *So your trip to Mississippi and Alabama led you to begin interviewing veterans of the civil rights movement and the later movements that they inspired.*

Messman: Yes. I've interviewed people like Dr. Bernard Lafayette, who was Dr. Martin Luther King's trusted lieutenant. Dr. Lafayette was the man who King asked to head up the Poor People's Campaign of 1968, and was also instrumental in the Selma Voting Rights Campaign of 1965.

I interviewed Vincent Harding, who was a very close friend of Martin Luther King, and who wrote King's famous "Beyond Vietnam" speech that he gave at Riverside Church in New York City in 1967. Vincent Harding has written two books about Martin Luther King, in addition to writing the powerful anti-war speech that became such a lightning rod in King's career.

Before that, Vincent Harding had been an organizer against both nuclear weapons and also against segregation in the early 1960s. He went on to have a really important career as a voice for peace and justice and as a professor and author and activist. He wrote the book *There Is a River* about the historic struggles against slavery in the United States.

I interviewed Rev. Phil Lawson, who is a pastor in the East Bay, and am also interviewing his brother, Reverend Jim Lawson, who is absolutely one of the most important figures in the history of the Civil Rights movement. Phil Lawson began organizing in the 1960s in many areas of the Civil Rights movement, and then he continued working his entire life for economic justice in Richmond, California, and the Bay Area.

I still feel that the interview I did with Rev. Phil Lawson is the most important single interview I've ever done. It was just amazing, the way that he interweaves all of the social change movements of modern times and shows the relationship between the struggle for immigrant rights and civil rights, the struggle for gay rights and African American rights. He put that all together so brilliantly. I knew Phil because he had been a mainstay in Religious Witness with Homeless People and had slept out on the cold streets with us in solidarity with the homeless people being targeted by San Francisco police. Phil also was arrested at an abandoned housing takeover in East Oakland that I organized.

Clarke: *You also have interviewed several prominent anti-war activists.*

Messman: I interviewed significant peace activists like David Hartsough, Country Joe McDonald and Jim and Shelley Douglass, who have been involved in an unbroken way for more than 50 years in the peace movement, the Civil Rights movement, and the anti-nuclear movement. They have so many lessons to give to today's activists.

I knew that I had to capture those lessons, and show how Jim and Shelley Douglass were able to interweave the message of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, and other great nonviolent fighters for peace and justice, and how they carried those lessons forward into the anti-nuclear movement, the anti-Vietnam movement, and the struggle against the Trident submarine.

I interviewed Kathy Kelly, a remarkable activist who is greatly admired by many people because she spent months in federal prison for organizing against nuclear weapons and doing civil disobedience. But she has also worked with people in Afghanistan and Iraq, violating U.S. law by carrying medical supplies to those people. Just like Rev. Lawson, Kathy Kelly interweaves all the movements until you begin to see it's all one movement. It's all one movement. It's a movement to protect human life in the face of a system that deals death.

Clarke: *In terms of the commonality of values of those you interviewed, they're all nonviolent practitioners for the most part. When you're looking at the core of what they're saying, is the linchpin of nonviolent direct action the willingness to risk one's own life in confrontation or is it building a big social movement? What's the interplay between the values and priorities of making an individual moral witness versus organizing a mass movement?*

Messman: There can sometimes seem to be a disconnect between making a prophetic moral witness on an individual level versus building a mass movement, but I don't think there's a contradiction at all. In fact, the anti-nuclear movement is a great example of that. Many of the first anti-nuclear activists in the late 1950s and early 1960s were very much moved by their spiritual and moral values to offer a personal witness that involved risking their lives in defense of life and peace.

They did incredibly brave things, like the people that sailed the Golden Rule ship right into the nuclear testing zone of the Pacific and literally risked their lives to prevent the atomic weapons testing that was polluting the entire world with radioactive fall-out. Yet, although that was a personal moral statement by a handful of activists, they were not just offering a one-shot moral witness. They inspired people for decades afterward. They're still active in the peace movement, and they're traveling around the country, speaking and writing books about their actions for nuclear disarmament.

Look at the prophetic moral witness against nuclear weapons carried out by Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker. Catholic Worker activists in New York City refused to take cover during the scares over nuclear weapons when the government was forcing people to take shelter in civil defense drills to prepare themselves to survive the Holocaust, which is absurd. Dorothy Day refused to take shelter and, instead, was arrested for her resistance.

Now that was a small action, seemingly just a personal moral witness by a handful of religious activists, and yet it inspired so many people in a process that I call the chain reaction of conscience. The chain reaction can begin anywhere. It can begin in the Pacific Ocean, when someone sails the Golden Rule against nuclear tests, or it can begin in a park in New York City, when protesters refuse to take part in civil defense drills. Yet wherever it begins, it can ripple outward until millions of consciences have been moved into action.

Clarke: *So acts of moral witness are one of the factors that can inspire a larger movement for social change, and result in many more people becoming involved?*

Messman: Yes, and I think you can see the linkage between the moral witness and the movement-building strategy very clearly in the work of Jim and Shelley Douglass at the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action. The Douglasses and other members of Pacific Life Community began doing very costly kinds of moral witness against the Trident nuclear submarine in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I was part of those protests. I was arrested at them and did time in federal prison.

We climbed over the fence into the Bangor Naval Base and were arrested and sentenced to several months in federal prison. My friends Karl Zanzig, David Armour and I walked inland to the nuclear weapons bunkers where Marines literally had "shoot to kill" orders, willing to risk everything to say "no" to nuclear madness.

My then-wife Darla Rucker and I sailed in the Trident boat blockade in 1982 when the first USS Ohio Trident-class nuclear submarine came into Puget Sound. There were about 50 of us in the water in sailboats and rowboats. The U.S. Navy sent 99 boats to destroy our little flotilla. That was a bigger navy than the navies of every other country in the world and they mounted it against a small group of nonviolent activists in rowboats and sailboats. It was a brutal assault on us, and it was front-page news all over the country.

So you can assume that these actions were a moral witness by a small number of people, and that's fine and good, but what about building the larger movement?

Yet even as Jim and Shelley Douglass were organizing these actions that were based on an individual moral witness against the destruction of life, they were also doing the organizing to educate, mobilize and inspire people all over the country. The next step in that campaign was when they discovered that the Department of Energy's White Train was carrying hydrogen warheads into the Bangor Naval Base. They were able to organize people in hundreds of communities to sit on the railroad tracks all over the country to block those train shipments.

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Ultimately, in fact, these blockades stopped the Department of Energy from being able to ship nuclear weapons on the trains. It was a very dangerous shipment of radioactive warheads, and people risked long jail sentences to stop them. Thousands of people became involved.

So the lesson is that you never know when an individual's moral witness is going to provide the right strategy and the right inspiration to help ignite a larger movement. But they often do.

Clarke: *The risky acts of the Berrigans and other activists in the Catholic Left helped to spark the mass movement against the Vietnam War.*

Messman: Yes, the anti-war resisters from what came to be known as the Catholic Left played a prophetic role during the Vietnam War. Daniel and Philip Berrigan and their fellow activists raided Selective Service offices and burned hundreds of draft files in resistance to the Vietnam War. It was a personal moral witness and they paid very high costs in terms of their lengthy prison sentences; yet they were also tied to a massive movement against the Vietnam War that was inspired by their brave actions.

So I don't think it's either/or. I don't think it's either an individual moral witness or organizing a mass movement. I think it's both/and. You need both. You need very militant actions by people willing to risk a lot to challenge an unjust system, and you also need the strategy that will then show millions of people how they can participate.

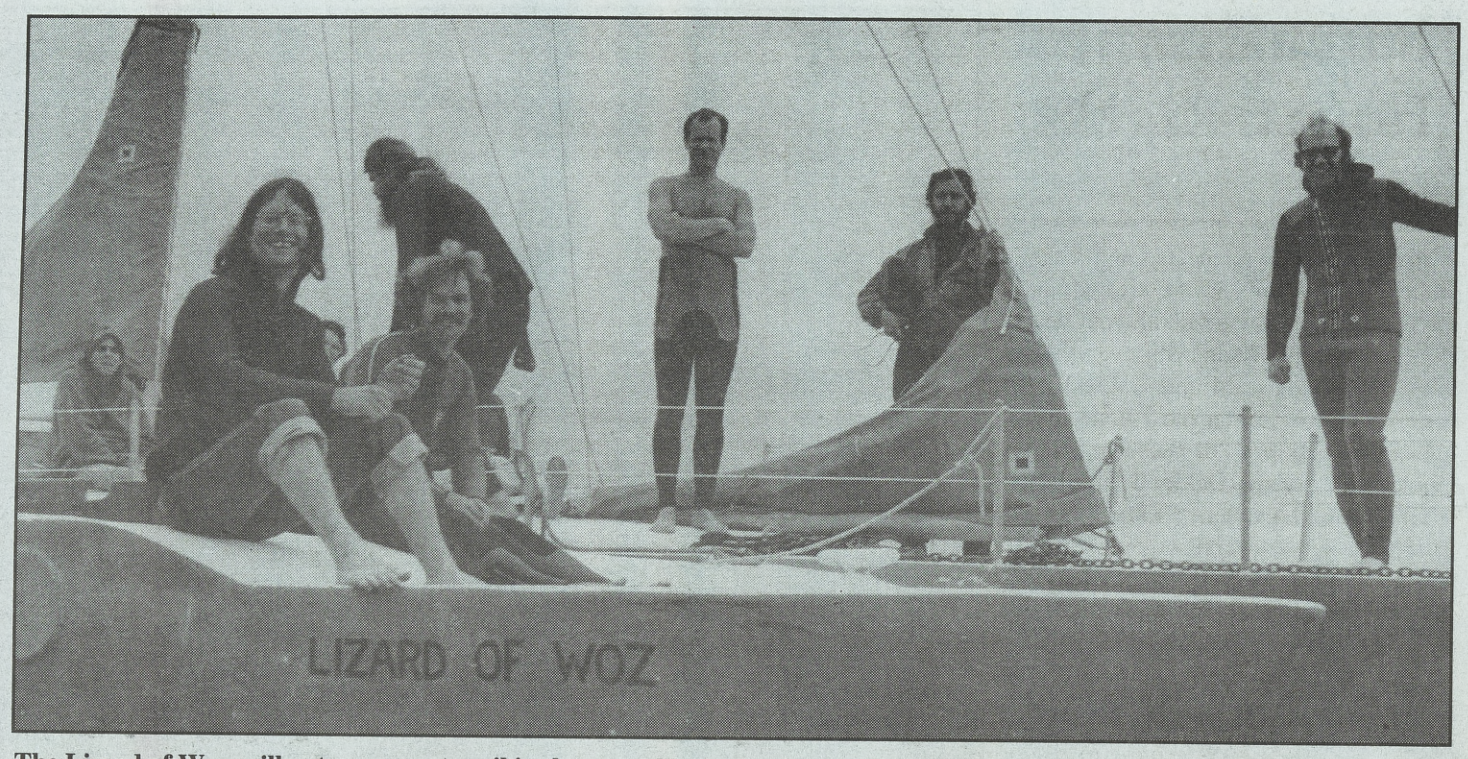
As you recall with the nuclear weapons movement, those few people that sailed their boats into the waters of the Pacific to stop nuclear testing, those few people that were arrested with Dorothy Day in protesting the civil defense drills, those became millions of people that voted for a nuclear freeze, and rallied outside the Pentagon and worked tirelessly for peace and disarmament.

In the worst years of the Reagan era, these movement activists were an incredibly important force. It jumped the ocean. The anti-nuclear movement spanned the continents. Peacemakers in Europe began holding equally large and important protests against Cruise and Pershing missiles and Trident submarines based in England. I think the way it has always worked in the history of social-change movements, is that you need those few people that are willing to risk anything. That inspiration can trigger a mass movement. I think it's always worked that way.

Clarke: *What are some of the moral lessons that you've seen emerge in the movements fighting poverty and homelessness that you try to bring to light, using the newspaper and other media?*

Messman: You know, the most important thing I learned from working on homeless issues for 30-plus years with the AFSC is something that's really simple to say: I love the homeless movement. In a sense, it's the smallest and most beleaguered movement in the country because even a lot of peace movement people, a lot of social justice people, don't get involved with the homeless movement. I think they're often afflicted with the same prejudice that homeless people really are beside the point.

The presupposition is that folks are out there languishing on the streets and living in shelters and maybe can't be organized very well. Well, we did a ton of organizing in Oakland that shows homeless people can be organized to do really intelligent actions.



The Lizard of Woz sailboat prepares to sail in the peace blockade of the USS Ohio, the first Trident nuclear submarine, as it entered Puget Sound. Jim Douglass stands at far right, Terry Messman sits at left foreground, Darla Rucker sits at far left.

We won a lot of permanent housing, transitional housing, and emergency housing in Oakland by doing civil disobedience solely with homeless people.

We did very confrontational actions, like seizing an abandoned federal building in Oakland, going up to the rooftop and barricading ourselves inside the building, demanding that it be used to house homeless people. We occupied vacant homes repossessed by HUD, and also did takeovers in vacant city buildings.

We did a wild theater piece where we trained with the Los Angeles Poverty Department theatrical troupe and then performed a drama that confronted the abuses of the welfare system — a radical piece of theater we held *inside* the Oakland welfare offices! We protested when the City criminalized sleeping by holding sleep-outs in Oakland parks, and then disrupting City Council meetings the next day. Those years were a blur of arrests.

My approach in Oakland was to work only with homeless people, because I wanted homeless people to build their own movement.

I've had a lot of good experiences working with peace groups, anti-nuclear groups, and anti-intervention groups, but what I've loved the most in my life is working with the homeless movement. All the people I admire most have been activists in the homeless movement, both the housed advocates and the homeless advocates. They have a great level of intelligence about these economic justice issues, and a deep dedication to fighting for human rights. They've figured out how to do this very difficult organizing and what's important in the lives of poor and disabled people, and their commitment really takes my breath away.

When I've traveled to other cities and met homeless activists there, I've been incredibly moved. Before doing this work on homeless issues with AFSC, I would have said my favorite people were the activists in the religious peace movement. They have the deepest souls, the deepest commitment, and they stand for the right values. I still love that spirit, but I love the homeless movement even more because they are so much the underdogs, and they are so committed and dedicated.

Clarke: *How can a small movement that faces such huge odds hope to become a large movement that works effectively for social change? Homeless people are such a small minority. Where do you see their allies coming from?*

Messman: Well, when I think, "How do we build this large, glorious movement?" I don't really think about that. I just think, "How can I serve this homeless movement that is so ignored in our country?"

Having said that, there are a lot of ways you can build connections with allies. We try to build connections with tenant movements because there are millions of tenants that face eviction and poor living circumstances and skyrocketing rents. Many of those tenants become homeless people. We've always tried to build connections with people fighting for the rights of those on welfare, people fighting for living wages that are being screwed over by the corporate powers that will not pay them a living wage.

We've always made common cause with people that have a vision of economic justice, like Rev. Phil Lawson. He's always worked on these larger issues of economic justice. And when the Occupy movement came along, I always used to say, "If you go to an Occupy march, read the signs that these young activists have created." Their protest signs were like a primer on economic justice, a primer against the banks and the corporate powers and Wall Street. It was like a class on economic justice in America just to read the picket signs on the marches.

I would've never dreamed that was going to happen. It was such a heartening uprising. It made me understand something else about social-change movements: You never know when the chain reaction of conscience will strike.

People have done this organizing for years and even decades. They have done everything right — the right strategies, the right actions, kept going with unfailing dedication for years — and have often only been able to mobilize the same relatively small numbers of people. Then, all of a sudden — and I think for reasons that cannot always be predicted ahead of time — a movement will blossom. Its day will come. The spirit of the times will change, and it will enable the movement to become bigger than we might have dreamed.

We've seen that pattern over and over in this country. You know, radicals working for social justice in the 1930s suddenly became a massive labor union uprising, and also a massive uprising of unemployed and evicted people. It's often happened that way, with long periods of hard, uphill struggles followed by amazing growth in these populist movements.

So I think, for me, the lesson is not so much how you strategize and how you organize — although that's important and I have done trainings on how to strategize and organize. But, to me, the most important thing is: How do you stay inspired? How do you stay faithful and true to the cause of justice? That's going to be what truly matters in the long run.

In the end, that is the meaning of our lives — whether we keep going, keep working for peace and justice, or give up in despair. It's the very meaning of our lives whether we keep going long enough to pass the torch to the next generation that will rise up and learn all these lessons and live them out anew.

Of course, some of those new movements will, in turn, wither away and people will despair about that, as they did with Occupy.

Clarke: *It's a life cycle.*

Messman: Yes, it's a life cycle. And you never, ever should despair. Because there's always an ability to create a new movement for human rights. Always.

Clarke: *You have the sung heroes like Lawson and Hartsough and Kathy Kelley. Maybe you can talk about some of the personalities and some of the people that live out on the streets and serve the people on the street — just some of those human beings and some of the stories and how you've interacted with them through the paper and your homeless organizing?*

Messman: Yeah, that's a good phrase, *"The sung and the unsung."* The unsung heroes and heroines — that is exactly how I conceive of it.

When I began working in Oakland back in 1986, I had a vague idea that we could somehow apply the methods and strategy of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience to the life-and-death issues facing the homeless community.

The minute we called homeless people together in Oakland to discuss these issues, I was just amazed to see how quickly they were ready to begin organizing and doing really serious actions, like takeovers of vacant housing to win affordable housing, and sleep-outs in city parks to end the arrests of homeless people.

It was incredible to see how quickly they mobilized and how skillfully they built campaigns for better treatment. They were ready to move, and just needed a few friends and allies to organize actions with them. I learned so much respect for the people organizing at an East Oakland shelter like Denise Gums and Lorenzo Carlisle and Rev. Carl Bennett, people who had already walked this walk.

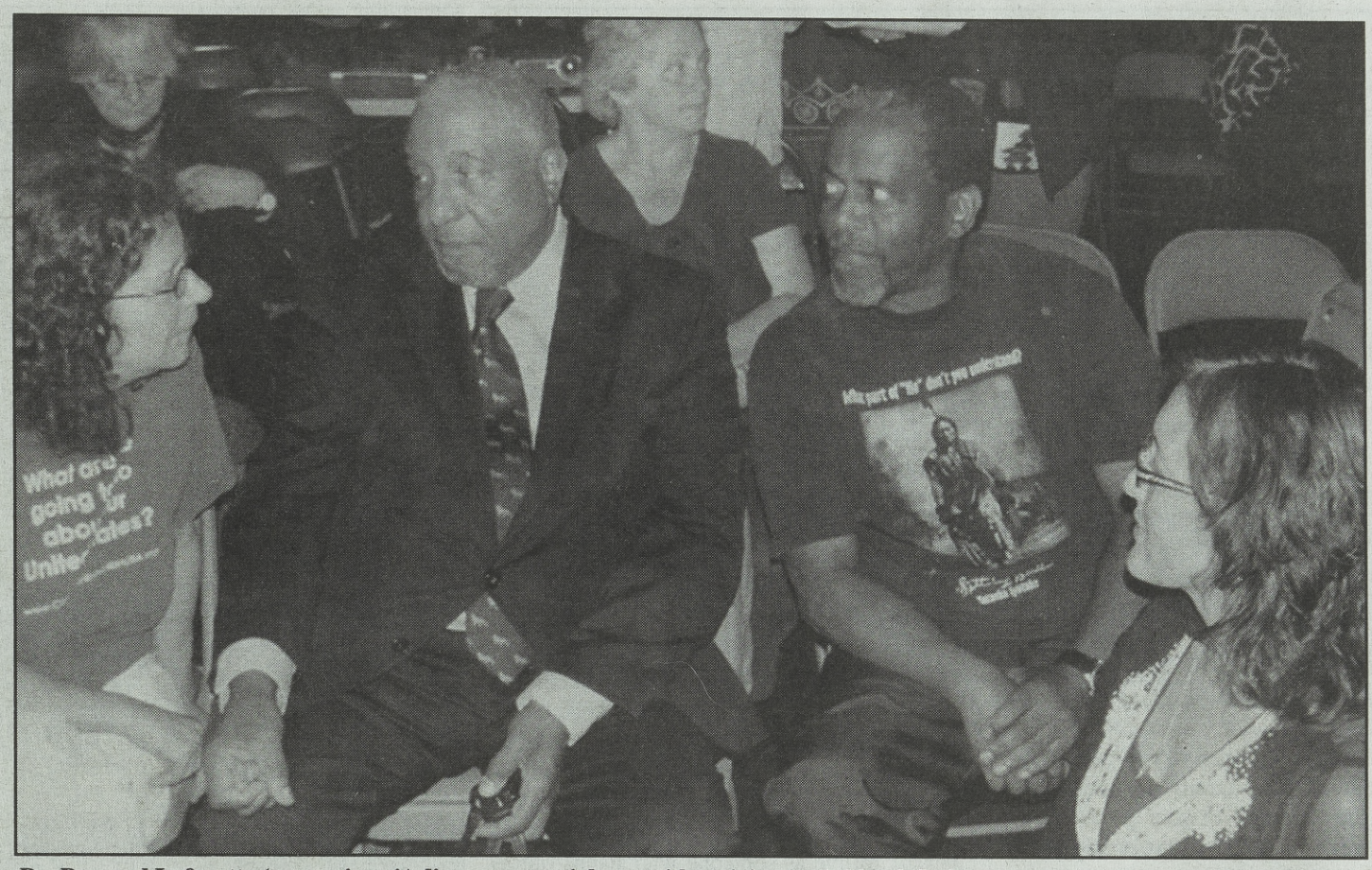
Then, when we formed the Oakland Homeless Union, I got to meet Dorothy King. She had been homeless due to domestic violence, and she was a fighter, a highly skilled and dedicated fighter for African Americans left homeless on the streets. She was a very moral person and insisted on moral accountability from all of us, so I jokingly called her the middle-class conscience of the Homeless Union.

She was a fighter and a brilliant organizer. She taught me more than any other single person has taught me about how you organize: How you make sure homeless people are a majority on the board of your activist group, and on the board of directors of the housing corporation we formed; how you make sure that African

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Dr. Bernard Lafayette *(center, in suit)* discusses nonviolence with activists in Oakland. Lafayette was chosen by Martin Luther King to direct the Poor People's Campaign in 1968, and now teaches Kingian Nonviolence. Photo by Howard Dyckoff

Americans are not cheated out of the jobs that arise out of what we created; and the values you fight for with all your heart.

And she did fight with everything she had. So did Gerald and Angie Waldron and Andrew Jackson and Tienne Grey and Glenna Jackson. All these people were mainstays of the Oakland Union of the Homeless. They were all homeless. None of them were veteran organizers and yet they were the best activists I ever worked with in my life — the most faithful, the most completely dedicated. They were the unsung heroes of their community.

Clarke: *The Oakland Homeless Union was one of the first groups to organize housing takeovers. How did it happen that homeless people were able to plan and carry out dozens of occupations in Oakland in the late 1980s and 1990s?*

Messman: We would literally organize a housing takeover with only a day's notice — and the members of our Union were there: "Bang!" They were there with their boots on and ready to be arrested and totally wonderful, lively spirits. They were facing every kind of bad thing in life: eviction notice, welfare cut-off, substance abuse, marital breakups. But when it was time to march on the welfare office or take over an abandoned federal building, they were always ready. Not a shadow of hesitation. I've never seen that kind of complete dedication anywhere else.

In one of our most important actions, we were arrested on the rooftop of this large vacant federal building in Oakland. We planned that action in a single day, and people were ready! That action turned out to be a three-day standoff, with us living on that rooftop for three days and nights, barricaded up on the roof, until the Oakland police used a battering ram to break down the door to the rooftop that we had barricaded, and arrested us.

People were ready and willing to carry out that heavy-duty action with only a single day's notice. I've never seen that level of willingness anywhere else. I hate to use the phrase "middle-class activist" because peace activists, for example, are not all middle class. Many have a lot of dedication, but I have never seen anywhere else the dedication I saw in the members of the Homeless Union. And that level of great dedication among homelessness activists carries forward to this day.

Clarke: *How does it carry forward?*

Messman: I know some of the people organizing recent actions in Berkeley and San Francisco and Santa Cruz, and *Street Spirit* reports on their actions, and their level of dedication is remarkable. Homeless people and advocates in Santa Cruz just celebrated the one-year anniversary of the Freedom Sleepers vigils. They have been sleeping out and risking arrest *every week for an entire year* in their never-say-die effort to defend the rights of homeless people in a city that keeps finding new ways to criminalize them. And they have been dedicated to this struggle for decades in Santa Cruz!

The homeless people who took part in the Liberty City occupation in Berkeley last December were almost unimaginably brave and determined. They carried on that occupation for weeks on end in the cold of winter, and did a great job of organizing. It was so instructive because it began with just a couple activists, like Sally Hindman, who wanted to resist the criminalization of homelessness in Berkeley. Sally decided to hold a sleep-out just before the City Council voted on a new set of anti-homeless ordinances. I didn't even think we had the energy to carry it off, given all the other commitments people had at the time. And it was a very small effort, at first.

Sally Hindman and Moni Law and a few other people did this sleep-out of about five or six persons on the steps of old Berkeley City Hall the night before the City Council passed these sickening anti-homeless laws by a 6-3 vote. That was a terrible blow, but it was also beautiful even in defeat, because hundreds of people came to the council meeting and spoke out passionately against the anti-homeless laws.

That would have been the end of it, except that on the night the City Council voted for these cruel laws, a bunch of homeless people came and saw that a few activists had held a sleep-out the night before. So they put up tents all over the grounds at the old Berkeley City Hall and stayed there *for weeks* in a self-governing occupation to protest the inhumanity of the anti-homeless laws. They called their occupation Liberty City, and it was governed by consensus, dedicated to no drugs, no alcohol, and used the tent occupation as a base to keep organizing on these issues. They remained night after night, week after week, until the Berkeley cops finally raided them.

The small group of housed activists who had slept out for a couple nights before the City Council voted told the council members about the hardships of the experience. They were kept up all night by the noise of the streets, and the freezing weather. This was in late November, early December. It was a terrible ordeal for them to undergo those long, sleepless nights for a couple nights.

But then, all these homeless people joined the sleep-out and made it their own. Dozens of them slept in those tents in cold weather, night after night after night, and then got up and organized all day. It tells you something remarkable about the human spirit.

It tells you that poverty doesn't weigh it down, doesn't always defeat it. It tells you that people have deep resources of caring and commitment, and that they can shine in actions like Liberty City. Yet, can you get middle-class activists in this country to ever understand that? That they can make common cause with the people that are forced to sleep outdoors all over this country? No. They're not there yet.

Clarke: *What about Occupy? They spoke out against poverty and the concentration of wealth and how the banks and corporations controlled the economy.*

Messman: Even with Occupy, there was very little solidarity with homeless people. Very little. Even though all their rhetoric was great, even though their direction and inspiration were admirable, they mostly failed to include homeless people. They didn't find a way to do that.

But it can be done, and we found a way to do it in Oakland in the Homeless Union for several years. We made the long march all the way from civil disobedience on the streets, through dozens of housing takeovers, and then all the way to actually developing permanent housing for homeless people. And if we did it, anybody can do it, because we were a ragtag handful.

Clarke: *What would a larger movement for social justice look like? Is there a way to link all these economic rights groups together in a common strategy?*

Messman: All the peace activists and university students and tenants groups and environmental groups could make common cause with homeless people. I thought that was going to happen when Occupy hit the streets, but it still has never really happened to any large extent.

Some day it will happen. Some day there will be a movement — I predict — where tenants will join with homeless people and those who have been evicted will join with those about to evicted, and they'll join with the low-wage workers and with the idealistic young people that care about human rights, and the anti-war activists, and there will be a movement.

That is the movement that I'm still hoping to see. That's the movement Martin Luther King tried to organize in 1968. And what baffles me endlessly is why people don't want to resurrect the Poor People's Movement that King launched. Everybody gives lip service to what a great leader he was, but he was more than that. He was a brilliant strategist, and a prophetic voice calling a nation to conscience. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee were truly brilliant organizers.

King's last prophetic vision of justice was the most important blueprint for social change we have been given. He saw clearly that we have to fight racism and militarism and poverty all at once. And where it begins is a Poor People's Campaign that brings together poor people across the country and joins forces with peace activists, labor activists and religious activists and creates a movement for economic justice. Then we will see social change.

People think King was a prophet. So why don't they look at what the prophet was actually doing when he was assassinated on April 4, 1968? He was building up to the encampment of poor people in Washington, D.C. But nearly the only echoes of King's last, best dream that I have seen in my lifetime are the homeless sleep-outs, housing protests and vacant housing takeovers around the nation.

King's last dream was a vision of building the Poor People's Campaign to fight for an Economic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged — affordable housing for the poorest people, full employment and living wages, and a guaranteed income for those unable to work. He gave his very life in the pursuit of that dream, and spent his last days organizing a poor people's march on Washington, D.C., and marching for justice for striking sanitation workers in Memphis. The ragtag homeless protests around the nation may be small, but they have great heart. They are the only legacy of King's last, best dream that I have seen in my lifetime.

Clarke: *You're referring to the model of Resurrection City that happened in Washington, D.C., after King was shot.*

Messman: Yeah, it's a resurrection of Resurrection City. You're right. Martin Luther King was murdered on April 4, 1968, and Resurrection City took place a couple months later, despite his death.

People were broken-hearted and despairing after his assassination, and yet they carried out Resurrection City anyway, with 50,000 people demonstrating in Washington, D.C. Many positive strides forward for hungry people were made in Resurrection City. It also helped kick-start a welfare rights movement. But King's assassination and Bobby Kennedy's assassination right afterwards tore the heart out of people.

But we should have recovered by now! There should be a resurrection of Resurrection City. It was King's last, best dream — and he was right, people.

If you want to see clearly the best vision for social justice in America, look very closely at Martin Luther King's life just before he was gunned down in April of 1968 and ask what he was doing.

He was marching in solidarity with striking sanitation workers in Memphis, and he was organizing a poor people's march on Washington, D.C., that would then set up a shantytown encampment that would be used as a base for a series of protests for economic justice. Those are the things that need to be resurrected.

Clarke: *All right! Thanks for sharing with us the history of Street Spirit — Homeless News and Justice Blues in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

The Nature of Bravery

Transgender, gay and lesbian people may experience the danger of physical attacks, and may also face the specter of social rejection. When bullying takes place, the victim of it exhibits bravery — not the perpetrator.

by Jack Bragen

Bravery, the ability to persevere in the face of fear, is a widely admired trait. There is no shortage of people who have it, including soldiers, policemen, firefighters, peace and civil rights activists, and also numerous journalists.

But, in some situations, isn't bravery contrary to evolution? Doesn't getting killed in an act of bravery cause one's genes not to be propagated? Not really. For example, if you save the life of a family member, even if you get killed in the process, that family member will propagate a number of your genes. That's why bravery isn't in short supply in our species, but also why it has its limits.

Sometimes bravery comes into play when quality of life is at stake. If someone has a terminal illness, or if they are living in conditions that are untenable, clinging to life seems to be less important. Numerous individuals involved in the Civil Rights Movement put their lives on the line for the sake of a larger purpose. The fact that African American people have faced discrimination and oppression, have been denied basic human rights, and have been outright killed, was, and continues to be, a good enough reason why many people have exhibited bravery.

Bravery seems to come into being when there is a cause someone can believe in that is more important than the continuation of one's own life. Sometimes bravery is misguided, such as when there is a suicide bomber, or when someone participates in a war. In these instances, someone sacrifices their life for the purpose of causing more destruction. Other acts of bravery are noble and serve the cause of peace and justice.

I believe bravery can be inborn, or it can be learned. But besides the willingness to endure physical danger, there is another form of bravery that I want to discuss. This type of bravery allows you to think for yourself.

As a teen in public school, I observed there was no shortage of male students who would hide behind a mask of bravado. They often felt big and strong when they picked on little guys like me.

Nevertheless, when it came to the possibility of standing out as different or showing a vulnerability, few had the guts to do that. Most students didn't want to stand out as different because of the likelihood of being targeted for ostracism and worse. When they came after me, it was usually in numbers. What does that tell you about their level of bravery?

The environment in public schools has been such that anyone who stands out as different in almost any way, shape, or form is ostracized and becomes a target.

The environment in which most people are raised teaches people to be socially afraid. This means that while there are many who are willing to risk life and limb when a situation calls for it, there are few who are willing to stand out looking like an outcast or a fool, or as someone called dishonorable. Many people are more afraid of social rejection than of the possibility of being physically harmed.

This is one reason why it is so frightening to live as someone who stands out as different. For transgender, gay, and lesbian people, they experience the danger of people physically attacking them, and they face the specter of social rejection. When bullying takes place, the victim of that treatment exhibits bravery, and not the perpetrator.

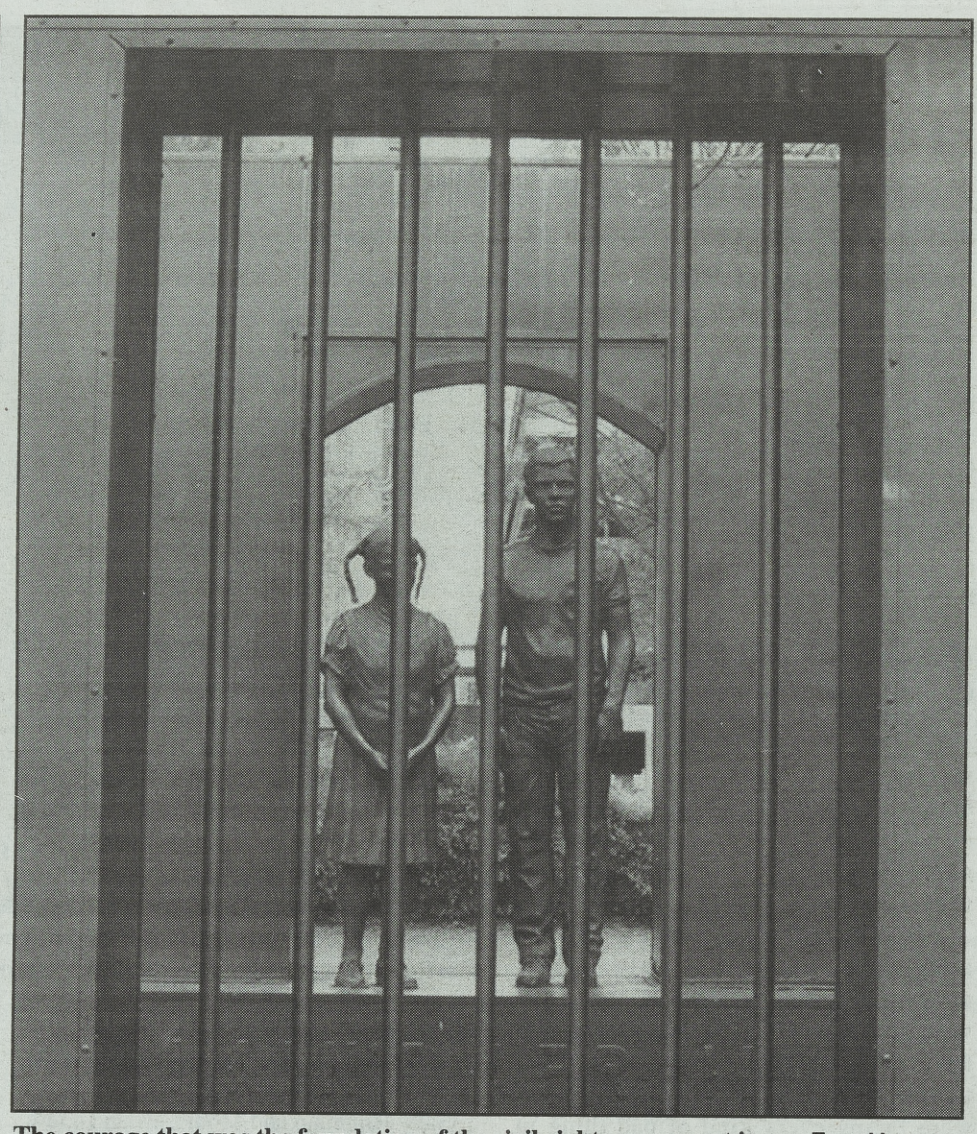
I was targeted because students believed I was good to pick on. In a couple of instances, I fought back physically, and in some instances, I fought back verbally. My older brother got it worse than I did, and was physically assaulted — the bullying he faced included getting his nose broken when a student punched him in the face.

The bully uses your fear as a weapon against you. If you learn to stop being afraid, it helps your situation. Even when I was in my 20s, people came after me. When I got into my 30s, due to the environment I was in at the time, I learned how to stand up for myself a lot more, and this included times in which people would come after me who were as much as twice my size. Upon getting older, having a more mature, more serious stance, and having a head of gray hair, most of this has gone away. But not all of it. On occasion, I have encountered violent men who are more than willing to come after an older, smaller man.

But, what is the essence of bravery, anyway? It isn't good or bad, since people can be brave for constructive as well as destructive reasons. It often comes from being in a situation in which one has no choice. While there are some who volunteer to face danger, others are not as adapted to it, but will, when a situation calls for it, rise to the occasion.

While bravery isn't always well purposed, we need to have a lot of it so that we can face the difficult years we are currently up against. Regardless of what politicians we elect, harder times are coming. The United States and other countries are falling apart politically and economically; we are having increasing civil unrest; and we can't count on anything.

Moreover, we are already seeing that those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, disabled and retired people, are the first to fall off a cliff. If we can cultivate bravery and the ability to adapt, it will only serve us well.



The courage that was the foundation of the civil rights movement is shown in this sculpture in a park in Birmingham, Alabama, where schoolchildren found the courage to go to jail for freedom. Terry Messman photo

She Slept Under A Full Moon

(For Someone On The Streets)

by Claire J. Baker

Though warned not to sleep
directly under the moon's
rounded light —
that it would reverse
her magnetic poles,
disrupt her karma,

not spooked by the warning
she opened her spirit
to the moon's benediction.

In a week of sleeping out
in a peaceful plaza —
no alarming fright, she
began a fresh direction,
a diction full of light.

Unembraced San Francisco Seniors

by George Wynn

A cold sun
just before dark
old black, brown
and white
men with packs
wandering from
the Public Library
festoon themselves
for the night
on downtown streets
unwelcome guests
weeded out
by the City
giving meaning
and sorrow
to the "Survival
of the Fittest."

Gentler Universes

by Peter Marin

Wife's dead of cancer,
years ago. I do
whatever a man does,
construction, paint, break stones,
rake leaves — muscle and sweat,
thirty bucks a day. Hate shelters,
live in a cave, dug it myself above
the beach, on the cliffs, timbers
for shoring, candles inside,
dry as a bone even in rain,
reading sci-fi until midnight, then
dreaming, stoned, curled like a baby,
of alien planets, gentler universes,
empty skies stretched
beyond all believing.

Big City Blues

by George Wynn

Finally got a job
and a place to stay
never mind — everybody
in the dump — either
a blank face or
a hostile look

way past midnight
in Baghdad by the Bay
he's listening to the little
red radio
familiar blues/country
songs: lovers split up
drift far apart
drown themselves in
the bottle to
ease their broken heart

The San Francisco Hurt

by George Wynn

They say adversity
is good for you
It makes you stronger
But how much adversity?
I see the hurt on the frowned
faces of far too many folks
who grew up in inner city
neighborhoods, parts of
them emotionally broken
by years and years of
streets and shelters
shaking their heads
saying," I ain't got
no job, no housing,
I need to live too!"

Dream Catchers

by Claire J. Baker

Our Indian friend
makes "dream catchers."
A hole centered in web
lets nightmares
slip through,
stagger in darkness,
tumble into a black hole —
gone forever.

These unique webs
are perfect for saving
"keeper dreams."
Sally tells us: each
finished dream catcher
is more genuine,
more true to life, when
left with a flaw.

Anthem, Stanza One

by Claire J. Baker

We homeless are part of the messy day.
So, world, don't ever judge us lost.
We're part of and beyond the fray.
Homeless, a part of a motley day
is trying our very best to stay
out of trouble, pay the cost.
We homeless have our messy days.
So never, world, see us as lost!

War Is Hell—and Carries the Threat of Extinction

Countless veterans have come home permanently disabled. Constant war has become a drain on the economy. And we have ignited a dangerous new level of global violence.

by Jack Bragen

The advent of atomic weapons has radically changed the way that humanity now looks at war. Additionally, the systematic decimation of the Earth's environment for purposes of comfort and profit cannot continue indefinitely.

Warfare is a major part of this ecological destruction, since our oceans, atmosphere, and land are impacted by the dropping of bombs, by nuclear tests, by disposal of nuclear waste, and by the pollution created by war vessels.

War is psychologically and socially poisonous. The misinformation that leaders use to sell war to the people doing the fighting and to other participants (meaning all of us) is a mindbender. The public is barraged by propaganda and media manipulation and this constant deception and distortion is psychologically harmful.

Even more injurious is the climate of fear and alarm and stress that governments deliberately provoke in the civilian populace in order to build support for their military spending and wars of aggression.

The human species needs to immediately wake up to the fact that we cannot continue on this path. The fact that countries are armed to the hilt with nuclear bombs, with many countries having launches on a hair trigger, means that in all probability, at some point, these weapons will be used.

With the cessation of the Cold War in the 1990s (and we didn't realize at the time that it would come back), and with Bill Clinton's election (arguably, a less war-like president than his predecessors), I believed at the time that people were finally evolving beyond war, and I thought that there really was hope for the future of our planet.

Then came changes in the U.S. government with the election of an administration that had an agenda of going to war in the Middle East. And then came the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, which was used to convince Americans that we ought to go to war. At the time, it seemed to me that we were going back to the Stone Age when government officials launched these large-scale wars.

The U.S. government convinced most people that we could "install a government" in Iraq that would be friendly to the U.S. I never believed a word of that, as evidenced by a letter that I sent to the *Contra Costa Times* that was published in 2002. I wrote that it was not believable that we could install a government in Iraq that would be able to govern.

Think of it this way: If a foreign country invaded the United States and tried to install a government supposedly better than what we have now, every able-bodied man, woman and child would fight such a thing. People living in other countries are the same way.

In the United States, we had some kind of delusion that we were the only country that had national pride, and that was capable of putting up a fight against invaders. Those who fought against us were labeled "insurgents" or "aggressors" because if we had called them "rebels" it would have evoked sympathy. In fact, with the invasion of Iraq, we were the ones carrying out a war of aggression.

Since then, we have paid a considerable price. We have countless veterans who have come home permanently disabled; constant war has become a constant drain on the U.S. economy; and we have ignited global violence, the scope of which we haven't seen since World War II.



"Study For A War Monument." Engraving by Art Hazelwood

The human body, mind, and constitution are increasingly not designed for violence. Evolution has taken us in a different direction than predators such as lions and tigers. Human beings are far more fragile physically, and also psychologically. Many people sustain lasting damage in their minds and hearts from violent incidents. I believe this evolutionary trend in humans exists because nonviolent people have a better chance at surviving, and therefore at transmitting their genes.

Yet, the world continues to fight. The violent instincts of many individuals have outlasted the human ability to physically and mentally sustain violence. This is a sickness that plagues the human species, a social cancer. Given our technological advances, warlike tendencies in people threaten to wipe out all life on our planet.

There is such a great variety in people. Some embrace war and violence and do not have a problem with cruelty. Others follow a peace ethic, and some go so far as not consuming animal products to survive. Some will fight in defense of self, defense of loved ones, and defense of innocent people who could use some help. Others across the board cannot be made to perpetrate violence.

The late science fiction author Isaac Asimov wrote, "Violence is the last resort of the incompetent." Certainly, with more brains come more alternatives and more choices, wherein we can use resources other than violence to get an objective accomplished or even to nonviolently defend ourselves against the violence of ignorant people.

Human beings must shed our violent tendencies or suffer the consequences, which could include our extinction. If human beings use atomic weapons on a massive scale, the likelihood of which increases as more time passes, there is no "shield" in existence that will protect life on our planet from the resulting radioactivity.

The rest of the creatures on our planet would then be innocent victims of the Earth becoming uninhabitable. (Other creatures do not get a vote, and other creatures do not have a say.) And this would be an obscene atrocity, one that would stand out in infamy in the universe.

Back to Saroyan Country

by George Wynn

Outside the Amtrak depot
the old literary Vet
shakes his head, "Too
much up here for me,
the circumstances
of aging move too quickly,
Can't survive on the
street no more."
He looks out at the Bay,
"Going back to
Saroyan Country. Got
old friends in the Valley
who'll help me out."

He taps my shoulder
"I'll write you."
"You always do
and long letters too."
"That's my style,"
he laughs then purses
his lips and points a
callused finger my way.
"You know friend, present
day San Francisco has
become the big devouring
the small, and damn it,
the unimaginable corporate
future is here deliberately
instilling fear beyond fear
on poor and homeless
folks suffering with
unaffordable housing
and no official declaration
of emergency!"

VISIONARIES

(in memory of Mary Rudge)

by Claire J. Baker

Seekers of the exotic,
riders of water and wind,
shapers of jewels and images,
builders of bridges/breakthroughs,
explorers of Mars, the psyche,
artists, students, elders, embryos
this moment conceived —

whatever we will be in an hour,
tomorrow, in a hundred years
or at the last turn of the earth
under moonlight's incantations,
whatever comes
may we lean toward
the language of roses.

The Known Soldier

by Claire J. Baker

We stand by
your fresh grave.
Grief
covers the
inscription
like a cozy
blanket.

The 21-gun
salute
is silent,
personal.

Song for Women

by Mary Rudge

Women of every Nation
Women of every tribe
used as spoils of war —
abused — with no recourse —
women with needs denied
with childhood stolen away,
chosen for soil and plunder
with bodies ripped asunder,
without words to say
to tell the horror —
you are my sister, sister
I think of you always.
I never forget you.
Be powerful in my love.
Find healing in my love.
Live forever in my love.

Women who work for justice
women, stand side by side,
women of every tribe, and
Nation, with the same story,
truth is your weapon, and song.
Women who've found the music
and the words, who will be heard
leading yourselves to glory
telling of lives fulfilled,
now and tomorrow —
I think of you always.
I never forget you.
Be powerful in your love.
Find healing in your love.
Live forever through your love.

You are my sister, sister,
I think of you always.
I never forget you.
Be powerful in my love.
Find healing in my love.
Live forever in my love.

For Vietnam Veterans

by Claire J. Baker

There are wounds deeper than death.
They kill the soul, but not the breath,
battles fought when war is past,
victories that will not last.

For all the wounds that may not heal,
honorable soldiers, we humbly kneel.

beyond war go we

by Judy Joy Jones

we are one heartbeat
no color
age
country
or religion
have we

spirit sees
only divinity
in you and me

our lives
are created
for great things

we are
precious souls
filled with the divine

joining
hearts and minds
go we

embracing the
sacred gift of life
beyond war
beyond war
go we
amen

S.F. Homeless Project Served Only the Status Quo



A homeless man sleeps on a San Francisco sidewalk as passers-by ignore him and pretend he's not even there. David Bacon photo

from page 1

A community slowly robbed of spaces to live, spaces to make art, places to worship or recreate, let alone places to live, has a deep poverty of leadership. The few reporters who notice need to write about that deficit—the real story.

sneak relevant factual information into their articles. But the *Chronicle's* main focus has always been to complain about how hard San Francisco and its politicians work to end homelessness and how much money is wasted — whoops, *spent* — in the process. The implication is that spending more money is not the answer. Rather, these poor people just need a strong incentive to *change their attitude*.

This is really handy for San Francisco politicians who need a popular boost in the next election. Nobody ever loses votes in San Francisco for kicking around the poor. It doesn't matter if the last anti-homeless law was a stupid, unenforceable, unconstitutional, counterproductive embarrassment even to a hard-working police officer — here comes another law!

No need to honestly re-prioritize the budget if you can unveil another pointless, unenforceable, anti-homeless law. People who pay attention can see where extremity meets levity: the towering pile of laws which make it illegal to pee or to sleep while acres of handy dough shows up for the yacht race.

The new, absurd anti-homeless law benefits politicians who get public applause for doing something about the issue of homelessness, whether it's counterproductive or not. Then, as the new pointless program with the cute name (Care Not Cash, Matrix, etc.) hits the wall, the *Chronicle* never does the story about why the program was a piece of crap: ineffective, poorly thought out and pointless.

Instead, they do another story blaming the poor. Followed by the story about the next pointless program with the new cute name and the new well-meaning director standing next to the next politician who needs a pre-election boost in the papers.

Who benefits from homelessness? Property owners do. Landlords do. Most law is bought and paid for by property owners to benefit property owners who are giddy with the fact that they can legally increase their rent from $800 a month to $8,000 a month because some tech guy will just pay it. The American system of voting, after all, began in this country not only by excluding African-Americans and women. *You couldn't vote at all if you didn't own property*.

Berkeleyside put a picture of a man sleeping on concrete on their website, apparently something from an archive. He had a sleeping bag pulled over him with his bicycle and backpack close by. He had no liquor bottle or beer can anywhere near him, but the photo was captioned "sleeping it off" as though he were drunk — as though one could pretty much assume anybody sleeping on the sidewalk was probably drunk or sleeping off a drinking binge.

That's how assumptions are made in the Bay Area, and it doesn't take long after unemployment, eviction, or serious illness uproots a life for people to begin making them. In a way, Berkeleyside's editors did us all a favor by illustrating on a Monday, before their coverage for the S.F. Homeless Project began on Wednesday, that the tradition of stereotyping homeless people caught up in a planned and predictable housing crisis would continue to be honored.

It was an ominous beginning to a week of perhaps good journalistic intentions. But what ensued was no substitute for analyzing the numbers, something most publications find it politically convenient to omit. Developers, after all, are the deep pockets in town, often the primary producers in showy campaigns for anti-homeless laws such as the anti-tent law currently being promoted for November's ballot by San Francisco Supervisor Mark Farrell, who coincidentally is running for re-election.

Nothing positions a politician better for re-election than another unconstitutional anti-homeless law, if the voting public, often honestly thirsting for a practical solution to decades of the nation's housing crisis, is fed enough daily, hostile, anti-poor screeds by an obedient press.

Nobody went to jail on Wall Street for tipping the world into economic chaos. And not everybody who lost their jobs, homes, families, and health after the crash in 2008 ended up on the street. But it's odd how little of that economic earthquake affected policy, both on and off Wall Street.

The *Chronicle's* Heather Knight and Kevin Fagan are two journalists who are occasionally given space enough to write about the fact that the current policy on tent cities and street dwellers nationwide — jailing and chasing people in circles — is more expensive than simply providing and paying for housing. But such paragraphs, usually buried in the back pages, are no match for the flashy regular columnists whose stock in trade is emphasizing *the horror people experience having to actually see others in need*.

Powerful emotional experience is certainly part of a writer's persuasion and analysis. But it's a curious kind of journalism that see-saws wildly between two opposing views of the inevitable poverty created by a planned housing crisis: the emotional toll on those who have to walk past visible poverty on the city streets, on the one hand, versus the humanity of the human beings caught in the cross-fire of a political climate which hasn't taken a practical approach to housing *for decades*.

"These people are human, many of them, on the streets and deserve to be recognized as such." — Michael Krasny on KQED's Forum program after a discussion of homelessness. 6-29-2016.

People don't mean to sound like idiots on live radio. But if Michael Krasny, the respected host of the Forum show on KQED radio, can do it, perhaps it has something to do with lacking practice, not of hosting radio shows, but of navigating a subject in which portraits of sympathetic poor people substitute for exposés of expensive, counterproductive, but politically popular policy.

We need to keep firmly in mind that there's money in homelessness. Right now, just about none of that money is being challenged and channeled to address community needs. Just about nobody is talking about real rent control, or linking rents to the minimum wage.

Just about nobody wants to promote a tracking system for the wealthy to make sure they're making appropriate choices with the profits they're making off the rest of us. The developers have managed to monetize poverty, a feat that makes even the savviest tech guy buying Mission district property salivate — *can I make an app for that?*

The S. F. Homeless Project was a magic act poised to capitalize on already committed funding to create the illusion of political change without having to actually manifest any. Those who work in print know that the front-page editorial for Sunday's *Chronicle* entitled "A Civic Disgrace," the culmination of the week's collected study and focus which re-committed to the status quo, was written well ahead of time.

Let's not kid ourselves. The absence of political and moral will is the real obstacle to change. If a city had the will to address the housing crisis, it would never allow developers to dedicate precious square footage to anything other than meeting community needs. Developers, after all, can go build luxury housing all over the world in places where their dollars are welcome.

But the raw math of the status quo — allowing developers to chew through all the honestly affordable housing in neighborhood after neighborhood on the off chance they might leave behind a couple of units affordable to the new poor, the $80,000 to $100,000 a year crowd — is not only not sensible, it is *not sustainable*.

Playing games with high-end pet products, or cosmetics, or clothing, are things investors and entrepreneurs can experiment with without necessarily ripping a culture to pieces. But playing games with housing, a human necessity, should be criminal.

A community slowly and systematically robbed of spaces to live, spaces to make art, spaces to worship, spaces to gather, places to recreate, let alone places to live, has a deep poverty of leadership. The few reporters who notice need to write about *that* deficit, which is the real story.

Come All of You Tech Workers

by Carol Denney

(An updated version of "Which Side Are You On," a song written in 1931 by Florence Reece, the wife of Sam Reece, a union organizer for the United Mine Workers in Harlan County, Kentucky.)

come all of you tech workers
and stop the war on tents
you've got to know you've played a role
in skyrocketing rents

chorus
which side are you on
which side are you on
which side are you on
which side are you on

come all of you tech workers
the city is your bitch
the rest of us are dying on the
streets or in a ditch

which side are you on
which side are you on...

come all of you tech workers
you've got a part to play
we're in a housing crisis
and it gets worse every day

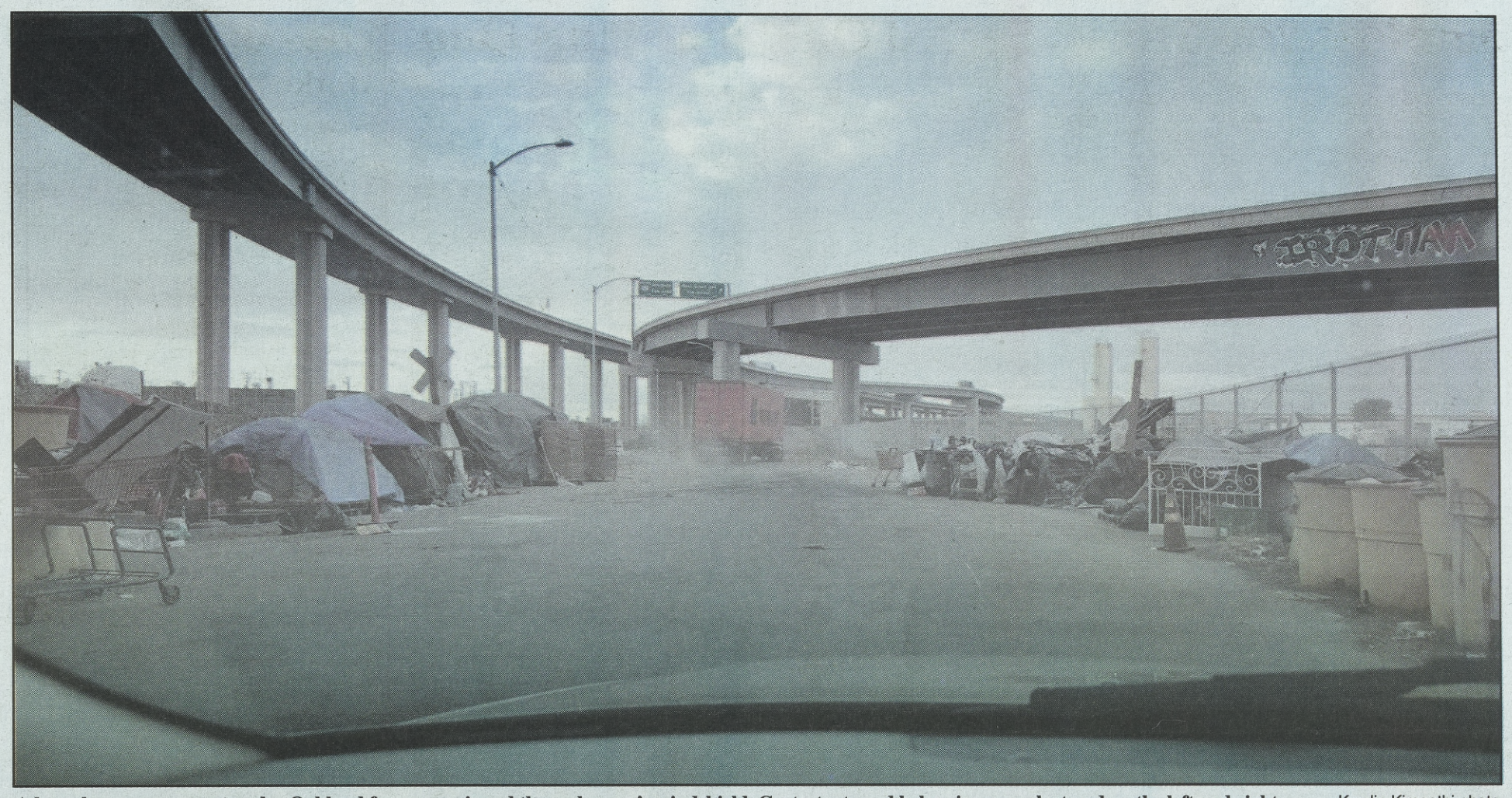
which side are you on
which side are you on...

come all of you tech workers
you can't deny the truth
the city paved the way for tech
and robbed us of a roof

which side are you on
which side are you on...

come all of you tech workers
big tech is getting fat
a lot of us are homeless and
there is no app for that

which side are you on
which side are you on
which side are you on
which side are you on



A homeless encampment under Oakland freeways, viewed through a car's windshield. Carts, tents and belongings are clustered on the left and right. Kwalin Kimaathi photo

Oakland's "Abatement" of the Homeless Community

from page 1

them that he was a full citizen of Oakland. In fact, he is a native of Oakland. He could inform them that if he had a choice, he would live somewhere else.

Ironically, Robert had many of the same concerns as one of the people emailing the City. The property manager of an apartment building near Lafayette Park wrote in an email on September 17, 2015, that the park was an "unsightly mess for too long ... We are sensitive to the homeless situation in Oakland, however drug use in the bathrooms and other illegal activities are a regular occurrence in this park to 3 am in the morning which pose a danger and disturbance to our residents." He wanted the park "cleaned up."

Then in an email on October 15, 2015, the property manager wrote: "The homeless encampment has only grown to about twice the size since my last email. My residents are scared to go into this park at night and walk their dogs ... As I stated in my previous email, we are sensitive to the homeless situation in Oakland but don't feel we need to live with the conditions that exist in this park and believe as residents of Oakland we should be able to enjoy the city parks as well."

The people living in the encampment are residents of Oakland as well, and they should be able to enjoy the park as they choose. However, the property manager's emails stereotyped and vilified the homeless in order to justify his demand that the City remove them. His email stereotyped them as vermin and blight that needed to be exterminated. His writing, "we are sensitive to the homeless situation," only disguised this attack on them.

Proving that no one benefits from merely displacing human beings, in an email on January 13, 2016, the property manager wrote that people continued to come to the encampment.

"This is really starting to put a strain on our business and has cost us thousands in lost revenues in unrented apartments that look at the park. I currently have an apartment where the homeless encampment is centered on the window in the living room which has been now vacant 134 days due to the view ... I have to keep trying to get things changed in the park and protect the interests of the owners."

The property manager asked Oakland officials to assist in protecting the interests of the owners. Similarly, the people living in the encampment would want the City to assist in protecting their interests. Perhaps it is in the property manager's and the owners' best interests to work with their neighbors in the encampment on an equal basis. The City can facilitate that.

The property manager's email dehumanized the people in the encampment. Even the City officials often used language that dehumanized people living in encampments in their emails. For example, in an email on January 26, 2016, the City referred to "debris abatement and homeless abatement."

"Abatement" generally refers to trash, noise, blight and other non-human problems. Using the word "abatement" to describe the displacement of human beings is an act of dehumanization. They are people, not debris, and must not disappear or get swept or scrubbed away. The people are not to be eliminated.

But where do these displaced Oakland citizens and residents go? In several emails, the City claimed to send "outreach teams" before the "clearing." But people were still displaced with nowhere to go.

The City and CalTrans scheduled and discussed displacements at their monthly coordination meetings. DeVries, who helps facilitate the closures of encampments, emailed me that I could not attend the July 2016 meeting because they were closed to the public. Thus, Oakland citizens and residents being displaced could not participate in the meetings where their own displacement was being discussed.

The only way to serve the homeless community is for the City of Oakland to get to know people like Robert. The City should not waste more money displacing people who have nowhere to go. Instead, the City should correct the attitude that some people are more equal than others.

Homeless people have always been here and will probably always be here. They have the right to vote in Oakland. New people have to live with their homeless neighbors. The homeless people have the right to be visible.



"Everybody Is Welcome on Earth." Art by Izzie with help from Micah and Rafael

RAINBOW POEM

The rainbow or Pride flag was designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978. The many colors represent the many kinds of people in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community.

RED for LIFE
Delicate, sacred, precious life.
The irreplaceable gift of life
that all of us has, once as you,
LIFE!

ORANGE for HEALING
Sana, sana, colita de rana.
Si no sanas hoy,
sanarás mañana.

Heal, heal, li'l tail of an eel,
If you don't heal today,
tomorrow you may. HEAL!

YELLOW for SUNLIGHT
As brother Martin Luther King Jr. said:
"Darkness cannot drive out darkness,
Only light can do that!
Hate cannot drive out hate;
Only love can do that."
Storms cannot drive out storms,
only SUNLIGHT!

GREEN for NATURE
Sunset flames glow
Flute wind blows
Diamond water flows
Honey rocks, bird music
Butterflies grow.
Thank you, NATURE!

BLUE for SERENITY or HARMONY
Crickets and cicadas
sing a freedom lullaby to the moon
as the stars cast rays of peace upon earth
SERENITY

VIOLET for SPIRIT
Spirit, the human spirit full of love,
the spirit that rises up
like the sun
for what's right!
SPIRIT!
*** *** *** *** ***

by Margot Pepper's 2nd Grade Language Lab: Clio W, Lucy C, Audrey K, Ruth K, Julian M, Izzie A, Cade V, Henry M, Max K, Kamren B, Kenzo E, Ezra Z.C, Eli R, Lulu Z, Theo B, Rowan F, Samantha L, Cash K, Sydney F, Olive P.Z, Lalima G, Viktor P, Micah K, Beck R, Hudson O, Micah S.S, Leah J, Natalie C, Jordan F, Mahal W.I, Siena L, Lawrence B.

Local Artist's Statement Piece on Homelessness

Aaron Schuyler's artwork is a reminder of the beauty of humanity that connects all of us, whether housed or not. It also sends out a message of gratitude to the world.

by Ariel J. Smythe

Local fine artist Aaron Schuyler has his eye on the issue of homelessness. While homelessness is a condition some may consider ugly, Schuyler offers his art piece "Cophinus," a part of the Disruptus exhibition at Oakland's Vessel Gallery, which debuted at last month's Art Murmur event, as a reminder of the beauty of humanity that connects all of us, whether housed or not.

"Cophinus" — defined as "a hamper or basket"— is beautiful to the eye and also beautiful to the heart and soul. Made largely of simple but quality pine with canvas, metal, water, propane, batteries, and found objects added to a standard metal shopping cart, the piece is functional.

The top of the box contains useable drawers that are sized to fit folded garments so that clean laundry might be neatly stored. It also contains a working, propane-fueled, cook top and a sink that is supplied with water pumped up from a gallon container in the cabinet underneath.

A hidden compartment offers help for one of the biggest problems of the homeless — having valuables stolen while one is asleep or otherwise engaged — and handily stows documents, identification, money and other important items. There is an attachment at the back of the piece which forms a one-person sleeping tent.

While viewers of the artwork may see its potential for practical use, Schuyler calls attention to the symbolism of the piece.

"Cophinus is an empty vessel," Schuyler says in his statement about the art piece, "a container yet to be filled. The shopping cart is remade with simple pine wood and readily available materials and hand tools. It is not filled with belongings or intended to present a completely stocked, self-contained, survival system, but is an empty container to prompt questions of what belongings, memories, fears and dreams a person brings with them. Its unadorned exterior is a blank slate into which a person's life experiences can be laid."

Lonnie Lee, Director of Vessel Gallery and exhibit curator, says, "Disruptus offers the willing, and the unwilling, an opportunity to react to a world of disruption in communities and individuals, and how our decisions, macro and micro, affect lives, livelihood, and the way we live."

Lee chose St. Mary's Center, which offers many services to the homeless community in Oakland, as the beneficiary of proceeds of the sale of pieces in the Disruptus exhibition. St. Mary's Center has been helping the poor in West Oakland for many years, providing a preschool as well as assistance for homeless individuals ages 55 and older.

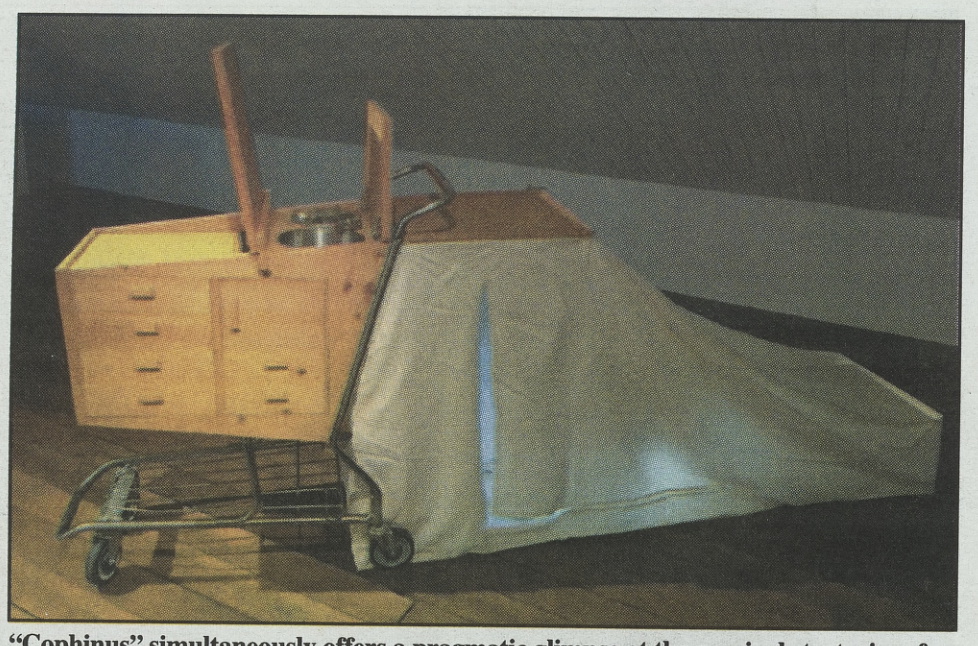
St. Mary's provides food, winter shelter, advocacy, and training to support self-sufficiency, together with love, care and a message of "we are family" that extends beyond staff and seniors to include volunteers and members of the community-at-large. This community thrives through being connected to a larger community of concern, which is made visible through the work of Schuyler and other artists included in this exhibit.

What was a real standout for many who saw Schuyler's "Cophinus" were the words the artist chose to place on the cart's push-handle: "THANK YOU." Imagine these words facing a homeless person pushing the cart, every day.

To ponder that this expression would be made either to or by a homeless individual is revolutionary. "Thank you" — a simple expression of gratitude — seems to be lacking in our society today.

Sending out an expression of general gratitude to the world via an art piece such as "Cophinus" is an exciting idea. And considering Art Murmur might be viewed as a West Coast "mini" Art Basel, one cannot help but be impressed by the juxtaposition of focus upon the important social concern of homelessness with the purchasing decisions of the financially enabled, potentially philanthropic, art-collecting world. Yet again, we see the power of artists to speak change to — and into — the world.

"Cophinus" will again be featured at the upcoming Oakland First Friday Art Murmur event on August 5 and on view until August 27 at Vessel Gallery, 471 25th Street, Oakland. More information can be obtained by visiting www.vessel-gallery.com.



"Cophinus" simultaneously offers a pragmatic glimpse at the survival strategies of homeless people, while also expressing aesthetic beauty — and thankfulness.



Local artist Aaron Schuyler's statement piece on homelessness is currently on display as part of the "Disruptus" exhibition at the Vessel Gallery in Oakland.

Ode to Mitch Snyder

by Judy Joy Jones

"Only the chosen ones have eyes that really see and ears that hear."

It's alright baby Mama has you now
cuddled close to her breast where
you can finally finally rest

hadn't a moment's peace on earth
did ya hon
Oh Mitch Snyder
chosen driven haunted one

You shed your blood so others could live
taking in by the thousands to your
shelters' warm arms
the poor unwanted neglected on earth
they flocked to your door knowing
a night's peace could be had
with no questions asked

In the coldest darkest nights
thru blizzards rain sleet and snow
as we slept warmly in our
secure little beds
with dollar signs dancin thru
our empty little heads
you darlin were collectin the
remains of the no names
at the city morgue's door and
holdin em tight to your breast
for you were the orphans'
god on earth Mitch
the daddy mother brother all in one
for the millions without anyone

on this earth you walked
alone and abused
but your mission my friend
bears fruit
The homeless of this land have
one less tear one more meal
and a night's freedom
from the violent who
eat the weak on the streets

unconditional love you gave
24 hours a day
you took in what society throws away
the strays
yea child you walked in dem shoes of
prisoner tramp and thief
so you knew didn't ya hon how it felt
on dem cold filthy concrete streets

humbled yourself before mankind
and now your chosen soul child
has gone home to god for its final rest

Oh yeah sweetie pie
your time for wailing done done
and for the price you paid Mitch Snyder
the whole world's gonna honor and
pay homage to you thru eternity

don't need to shed your tears
no more child
it's time for the trumpets
and peace bells to ring out your
name to everyone on earth and
all the saints gather round
and place upon your precious head
the crown of the brave valiant
and those that persevered

in thy hands feet and brow
the stigmata do i see there
we crucified thee mitch
with ignorance pride and
tightly closed eyes

and in your side with
your own hand
you placed the final wound
cause child you had given
all you came to earth to give
and winged your way back home
to god as angels do
as soon as their chosen works are thru

a saint's halo shall grace thee
of this i am certain

and now mr. snyder may i
this unknown poet wash
your holy feet with my teardrops
dotted here and there
and dry them with my hair

you died for love mitch snyder
and i / we love you

Note: I wrote this ode to Mitch Snyder, founder of the Community for Creative Nonviolence, because he created a homeless shelter that provides refuge and meals for two thousand people who otherwise would suffer on the cold streets of Washington, D.C. They have named a street near the shelter after Mitch Snyder.

Six months after I met and interviewed him, he died by hanging himself. I am forever grateful that Mitch gave his life for the poorest of the poor. — *Judy Jones*

you are precious to me

by Judy Joy Jones

puttin people in prisons
instead of schools

tellin everyone
guns not prayers
will keep em safe

while ignoring
people eating out
of garbage cans

all this hate
we created
comin back
haunting us
mirroring our souls
thru eternity

and concrete streets
will be where
we sleep

when will we see
we are created
to love and be loved
and rise above
violence and hate

you my friend
are precious to me
you are so very very
precious to me